DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS

DEGARMO'S WIFE

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DEGARMO'S WIFE
AND OTHER STORIES

THE WORKS OF DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS

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D. APPLETON AND COMPANY, NEW YORK

David Graham Phillips

DEGARMO'S WIFE

AND OTHER STORIES

NEW YORK AND LONDON
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1913

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Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

	PAGE
DEGARMO'S WIFE	3
ENID	
COURTSHIP	115
MARRIAGE	154
LOVE	195
RED ROSES AND WHITE	235

DEGARMO'S WIFE

DEGARMO'S WIFE

I

THE Degarmos had lived at Saint Christopher from its beginnings; and the French had founded it away back in the eighteenth century as a trading post, the third in importance in their frontier chain from Quebec to New Orleans. There was a time when Saint X was larger than New York or Philadelphia, and much farther advanced in civilization. The first American Degarmo had dwelt in its most pretentious house. There had been a Revolutionary General Degarmo, an 1812 General Degarmo, a Civil War General Degarmo, one of the handsomest and most martial looking in the Indiana contingent. There had been Governors Degarmo, United States Senators Degarmo; and colonels and judges and reverends, more than two score.

For nearly two centuries the Degarmos had been rich; for nearly two centuries they had been looked up to by those who were not rich and by the newly rich. The Degarmos were at once the pride and the chagrin of Saint X—the pride because they were real aristocrats and because their house was a palace, would have made a respectable showing even among the mansions of the autocracy in the big cities; the chagrin because they were no longer really residents of Saint X, but had become expatriates, dwellers in New York and London and Paris. The main line of the family had dwindled to a sister and a brother.

The sister was Mrs. Arthur Houghton, a leader of fashionable society in the East. She rarely came to Saint X, then only on business; she always so arranged it that she would arrive in the morning and leave the same night, and would be too busy in the intervening hours to exchange even the hastiest civilities with the eager celebrities of the local "haut monde." The brother was Joe—"young Joe" everybody called

him; for unlike Saint X's bachelors, and married men, too, of thirty-five and beyond, he was still a young man in looks, in manner and in thought. Joe came twice a year to Saint X, except when he happened to prolong his annual stay abroad. He came about the family estate and interests; and he usually stayed a month. He kept house in the west wing of the big Degarmo homestead.

It was on one of these semi-annual visits that he met Norma Murdock and became engaged to her —this though Mrs. Murdock and all the Saint X mothers with marriageable daughters cried out against it; for Norma had just turned seventeen, and Joe was at least a year older than her mother. But bitter though Mrs. Murdock's opposition was, neither Joe nor "the child" heeded it. They knew it was a matter of words only, also that its real origin was anger because she was awakening to the appalling fact that she had let herself become a middle-aged woman while her husband had remained a young man. Nor did Joe dread Saint X's outraged sense of de-

cency; he understood it, also. His one fear was his sister, Antoinette. He knew that she would be furious. Not because the Murdock wealth was new; it had not been by blind chance that the Degarmos had kept rich for so many generations without work and without commercial ability. They had always married money, and had had pride enough to feel that their aristocratic aroma was sufficiently strong to overpower, if not to extinguish quite, any unpleasant odors from money of however squalid origin. No; it was—as Joe well knew—the danger to sister Tony's dreams of a highly aristocratic marriage for him, perhaps with a foreign woman of title, that would set her to sneering and scheming against the marriage.

When he wrote Tony the news of his engagement, he put it as if he expected her to be delighted. But—"She'll be on by the first train after she gets my letter," he said to himself. And so confident was he, that on the third morning after the dispatch of his letter he said to his valet, "I think Mrs. Houghton will be here by

the early train. Send a trap to meet her and have breakfast for two."

At a little after nine Mrs. Houghton, shown into the dining room, found him seated at a table drawn up to the window and laid for two. He looked exceedingly luxurious in white silk crepe pajamas and a heavily embroidered white silk dressing gown. "Hope I didn't drag you out of bed," said she.

"Oh, no," replied he. "I always get up early out here. But I don't finish dressing until after breakfast. The day's got to be filled in somehow." He looked at her admiringly. "However did you contrive to look so fresh, just from a train overnight?"

She did indeed look fresh, the most attractive type of New York's luxurious class. She was nearly forty years old; she seemed, even in strong daylight, hardly so much as thirty. It was the sole duty of no less than four busy servants to take care of her personally—her clothes, her skin, her figure, her hair. On her laziest day she spent at least five hours in the fight for youth;

and each year she gave up a month, often two, to thorough and on the whole intelligent overhauling and repairs.

"Why do most women, especially of the middle and lower classes, let themselves go to pieces so young?" she often wondered. "It's really disgraceful—inexcusable! Why, at fifty I intend to be still presentable."

The purpose of this resolute anticipation of the assaults of old age was the gratification of personal vanity; for she loved neither her husband nor any other man, and had no expectation or desire ever to love. For one born and bred in selfishness her heart was surprisingly warm and generous, but love had seemed to her vulgar and repulsive from the beginning of the honeymoon with a man she married because he was a rich New Yorker, knowing, and known of, the "right sort of people."

She delighted in her good looks, delighted in the conquests they made for her; but she disdained the purpose for which nature had contrived those limpid, languorous eyes, and full red

lips and rounded, firm cheeks and throat and shoulders.

"What they call love nowadays," she would say to an admirer when she had lured him as far as she permitted a man to come toward her, "seems to me to put us on the level with the peasantry and their animals. I may be puritanic, but I can't get away from the ideas our fathers and mothers had." And she did not in the least suspect that those whom she despised as coarse might have the right to retort upon her for using the allurements of passion to ensnare food for an appetite baser than passion—vanity.

"Fresh!" she exclaimed, at her brother's compliment. "I feel hot and shriveled, inside and out. I didn't sleep last night. As soon as Dickens leaves us alone I'll tell you why." And when Dickens had brought the coffee—a huge silver tray with great pots and bowls of antique silver on the embroidered linen—and had withdrawn, she began: "This engagement of yours—it's only a temporary affair?"

"Probably," replied her brother, indifferently.

"There's nothing permanent about marriages nowadays, you know. Maybe you prefer tea?"

"Marriage!" she exclaimed, making a wry face. "No. Coffee. Why on earth are *you* thinking of marriage?"

"Why, indeed?" said he. "You'd better fix your own coffee."

As she poured milk and coffee in equal streams into the huge cup with its old-fashioned flower design, she talked: "I understand women marrying; they can't get freedom without it. I understand men among the bourgeoisie and the working class marrying; they get a janitress and a housekeeper all for less than either would cost them without marriage. But why should a man like *you* marry? You don't want children?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Then why—why?"

He bit off the end of a croissant, and with his mouth full said, "Love."

She laughed. "Love!"

"The same."

"You?"

"Me, Tony."

"But you know that, if you marry the woman you love, you'll get over it. And—then what?"

He shrugged his shoulders, chewed slowly, reflectively. Finally he said: "Good coffee, isn't it? I never in my life refused myself anything I wanted. I want her. To get her I've got to marry her. Afterward——" He shrugged his shoulders again.

She concealed her exasperation. "If you feel you must have a wife," pursued she, "why not marry some woman you'd be proud of—some woman with experience in social matters, in presiding over a big establishment?"

He looked at her with a curious smile. "Because I happen to want this girl. You don't understand, Tony. You can't. There was something left out of you. It wasn't left out of me—though I must say I'd have laughed if anyone had told me I'd be a slave to a fancy for a—a mere woman."

"And they say she looks the image of her mother at the same age. That means"—Tony

made several large vague gestures, indicating increase of bulk. "If you'll put off the marriage a little while, Joe," she added, "you'll break the engagement. Fat is so—so common!"

"It's worse than common," replied Joe. "It's repulsive. I often look at her and see her as she'll be ten years from now." He made a grimace. "But it's no use. There she is, and—I must have her. I can't cure myself. It's a pity I was brought up to be so selfish. I've no self-control when I see anything I want."

His sister looked dejected. "Joe, I really believe you do seriously intend to marry her."

"You may as well resign yourself to it."

"But what are you going to do about—about ——"

Joe's eyes stopped her. "The past is—past," said he. "I'm going to marry Norma Murdock."

"What a disgust you'll have six weeks after," she mused aloud. "No doubt she's in love with you."

Degarmo pushed back his chair, rose, drew the cord of his white silk robe a little more firmly,

lit a cigarette and walked up and down several times before replying. "No," said he, finally, with a sort of ironic bitterness. "Whoever heard of a girl of her age being in love with a real person? She's in love with a purely imaginary person whom she sees or fancies she sees when she sees or thinks of me." He paused before his sister. "I wish she *were* in love with me."

Tony looked up at him and laughed. "You know you don't. No man of your experience ever wished to be bored with love."

"Nevertheless, I do wish it. Tony, I'm mad about her. I'd never dream of letting her see it, or she'd walk on me and kick me aside. I want her love, yet to keep her I've got to pose as the grand, superior, indifferent, man-of-the-world, hero-of-a-novel whom she worships. Me she'd despise as—as much as I despise myself."

His sister studied him with amused pity. "No, I don't understand," she said. "And I'm glad I don't. Can't you see that a few weeks, maybe only a few days after you've tied yourself to her, you'll not care a rap what she thinks of you, but

will be wondering how you could ever have been such an ass as to think you cared?"

"You imagine she's like her mother," replied he. "Believe me, she's not. She looks like her mother, but she's got a mind like her father. That's why I feel uncomfortable when I think of what'll happen when she finds me out."

"You are hopeless!" cried Tony. "Hopeless! When a man imagines that a silly little girl has intellect because she has fine eyes and a voluptuous figure, nothing can be done with him." Joe shrugged his shoulders, held out the cigarette box.

"Have one?" he said. Then while she was lighting it, "I wish I were simply imagining her brains. But I'm not. I ain't in love with her brains—I hate 'em, I'm afraid of 'em. Possibly —probably—I had brains to start with. But mine went to seed long ago. Her mind is—appallingly active. I dread the time when—when I may still be in love with her, while she has found me out, and—and all that. D—n it, Tony," he cried with sudden energy. "I'm jealous even

now of what I fear will happen sooner or later after we're married. I'm nearly twenty years older than she—thirty-seven—older than her mother—so few years younger than her father that I felt—ridiculous when I asked him for her."

"That's nonsense," her sister assured him. "In marrying, a woman's never too young and a man never too old. As for this girl, at twenty-five she'll be fat and middle-aged—figure gone—teeth a bit queer from maternity—a bunch of wrinkles at the corner of either eye—and a good mother to her children—when she's not too lazy to see 'em. While you—" She gave her brother an envious glance—"You men. At fifty you'll look just about as you do now—a little more attractive if possible because you'll be still more fascinatingly indifferent and suggestive of vistas on vistas of past love affairs. You needn't fret about *her*. She's like her ma; she can hardly wait for marriage to 'settle.'"

"I hope so!" exclaimed he, sincerely. "I'd infinitely prefer boredom to jealousy. One can get away from boredom."

"It'll be worse than either. It'll be irritation against yourself and against her."

He tossed his cigarette into the huge ash bowl on his writing table. His gesture was a dismissal of the subject. "Run along, Tony—amuse yourself downstairs," said he. "I'll dress and take you to call."

Antoinette went, and her cheerfulness soon returned. She knew the mental processes of her sort of people—how intense are their caprices, but how quickly purpose faints and expires. She had not calculated upon accomplishing much by talking against the engagement. It was the effect of contrast that she really relied upon.

"Out here," she reasoned, "he has lost his point of view. As soon as he sees us together, he'll come to his senses." And there was more of shrewdness than of vanity in the calculation; for, any woman who has not been "about" cannot but seem awkward, crude, unformed, beside a "woman of the world." It is not a matter of mannered people, the manners of "the world" seem, and are, distinctly bad. It is not a matter

of dress—fashionable women, depending upon dressmakers, milliners and maids, are usually dressed almost sloppily and with no individuality of taste. It is not a matter of knowledge—that least of all; the fashionable woman, or man, has only to dabble her or his fingers in the Pierian pool to show how strange and pleasant its waters are to her or him. It is, rather, a matter of fundamental self-confidence—a certainty, attainable only by wide experience, that what one is wearing, saying, doing, is "all right." And Joe Degarmo's sister, a "howling swell" by birth, by training, by marriage, by association, by familiarity with the "best society" on both sides of the Atlantic, was past mistress of the arts of polite effrontery, and subtle egotism which enables one to "put in their place" those less favored.

She vaguely remembered Norma as a long-legged, long-braided, wide-mouthed child, freckled and frowzy, a tree climber, a loud laugher, but looking enough like Sophy Murdock in her early married days, when her beauty caused people to stop and stare, to make it cer-

tain that she would "take after" her mother. Vastly different was the figure that emerged from among the tall, hooped-in rose bushes at sounds of wheels on the main drive of the Murdock place. Joe, a light in his eyes that made his sister begin to distrust her estimate of her handsome, worldly brother, reined in and said—carelessly, yet with a note in his voice which his sister had never heard before. "Hello, Norma! You remember my sister, Tony?"

Norma turned grave, luminous, searching eyes upon the quietly gorgeous woman beside her lover in the cart. The girl had not a trace of self-consciousness. "Oh, yes," she said. Then, with a smile in the eyes only, "We used to call you Queen Anne—and pretended to dislike you—though it was simply envy." And she extended her hand to Mrs. Houghton's. The thin sleeve of her blouse did not conceal the perfection of her long, slender arm.

Tony no longer wondered that Joe was infatuated; she, expert in the art of physical appeal to men, recognized in the girl's fresh, radiant loveli-

ness the unadulterated nature on which her own imitative art was built. This, with no jealousy; for she regarded art as superior to nature, more than making up in grace and effective grouping what it lacked in boldness and energy. She put on an expression of sweet, impulsive admiration. "How lovely you are!" she exclaimed. "The image of your mother at your age."

But Norma, with thoughts all upon Joe, merely said: "Thank you," as if she hardly heard. Then to Joe, "Father and Charley have just gone."

Degarmo explained to his sister: "Mr. Murdock and his son are off to the Northwest and Canada for three months' shooting. I'm to join them in September."

Mrs Houghton was rosy with the rage of the expert marksman whose first shot in the contest has flown wide of the target. To the chagrin of both the brother and the sister—for widely different reasons—Norma kept to the background during the entire call. This retiring silence was not the result of wisdom, of a femi-

ninely crafty refusal to be drawn into an unequal combat, one where simplicity would surely be worsted by worldliness; Norma kept within herself simply because her mind was so full of love that she was walking through life like a somnambulist, avoiding obstacles, conversational as well as physical, by instinct only.

On the way home Joe, uneasily reading an unfavorable verdict in Tony's grim silence, at last said: "You couldn't judge her to-day. I never knew her to be so quiet. You'll find her very clever, when she gets going."

Mrs. Houghton's answer was a lift of the brows and a sarcastic smile.

"Don't be exasperated because she ignored you."

"Don't talk to me about her," said she, curtly. "All I've got to say is, get her to visit New York and study her there. I'll assure a cure in two weeks."

"But the worst of it is I don't want to be cured. Besides, she wouldn't go. She disliked you on sight. Gad, what instinct you women have. She

scented an enemy instantly, and into her shell she went, with you rattling your claws on it, like a leopard on a turtle's back."

Tony frowned, then laughed good-humoredly. "She's better than I expected," she said generously. "But—that doesn't change my warning—not a jot!"

"Right you are," assented her brother. Then, into his face came the expression she had seen there when Norma, all in white, save the one big rose in her garden hat, appeared among the roses. "Right you are," he repeated. "But, Tony, I've got to have Norma, I've *got* to have her!"

"No trouble about getting her. She's fairly driveling calf-love."

"I wish to God mine were," he muttered. "I'm afraid to think what a fatuous fool she has made of me."

He looked at his sister, pain in his eyes and a mute appeal for sympathy. And she, returning his look, found that the passion which had always repulsed her when men exhibited it toward

herself now seemed a high, half-divine, if half-lunatic mystery.

"Poor Joe!" she said, softly. "Poor Joe!" she repeated, with an envious sigh. For, at the moment, her own life seemed a dreary sham, a garden made of flowers—in gold and silver and precious stones, most curiously and intricately wrought, but still barren and scentless artificiality. "Yes, I *have* missed something," thought she. "Joe's right; there's a lack in me. I've missed something and—maybe it was the best."

. . . . . .

Norma was singing and playing one of Schumann's songs to Joe as he smoked on the balcony outside the music room windows. The sound ceased and an instant later her arms, white and cool and electric, were round his neck. "Tell me," she murmured, "would you love me just the same if I were homely and—and—fat?"

"What put that into your head?" he asked. And he laughed and drew her head down so that he might feel her cheek against his.

"Would you?"

"Will you love me when I'm old and fat or withered, as I'll probably be, long before you show the least signs of age?"

"Now, don't evade. Would you?"

"But by that time I'll be too dim-eyed to know what you look like and too rheumatic to care."

"Would you?"

"Don't put me to the test." He laughed carelessly. "It's one of those things one has no desire to know."

But she knew what he meant. And her Arcady no longer stretched limitlessly before her. It sharply contracted until she could see, not exactly its boundary, but the direction in which its boundary lay. "No," she said, pensively. "You wouldn't. I've been thinking about it since—since your sister was here. I'm sure old age and love can't exist together—at least, not the kind of love I feel for you and feel in you."

His eyes, which she could not see, had the look of pain in them, the shadow that creeps into the happiest moment of those who have lived, and darkens and saddens and endears it. His

arms reached out for her, to clasp her lightly. But the voice was light and mocking, as he said: "Well—what are you going to do about it?"

She shook her head slowly, gazing out into the starlight, her dimpled elbow in the bosom of his evening shirt. "Be young as long as I can—and make you keep young. I guess there isn't much in life after youth is gone. Look at papa and mama—what do they get out of it?"

"But they're still—young."

"Father—perhaps; but not mother." Her eyes sought his lovingly. "I'm so glad you're years older than I." Her light fingers caressed his hair with its fascinating faint tracings of silver. "I love your gray hairs—oh, you've got lots of them." She laughed at him, grew instantly grave, with eyes questioning the mystery of the soft summer night. "Why can't men love women as women love men? Why is it that it's only for their youth that women are loved? It makes life so sad for us."

"What do you love me for?" asked Degarmo, hesitatingly, as if he must inquire, though he knew the answer would not be to his liking.

She reflected a moment, then disappeared through the open window. When she reappeared, she had a little book in her hand. She stood where the light fell upon her profile and her thick wavy hair and one bare white shoulder and one slim round arm and the printed page. She read, and her voice seemed of the same substance as the starlight and the wind murmuring among the trees:

"When I saw Theseus or the others, I felt that I would like to see them in the games or at war or at the chase, how they would acquit themselves. But when I saw Hercules, I did not feel so. Whether he sat or stood, spoke or was silent, moved or was still, whatever he did, I was content."

And then there were two alone in the starlight, their lips meeting, one of his hands pressing the soft coil of her hair, the other upon her broad, slender back at the line of the evening bodice that left her smooth dimpled shoulders bare. "Whatever you do, or are," she murmured, "I am content."

II

THEY spent the honeymoon in camp at Slumber Lake, in the Adirondacks. After six weeks her father came to take them home, as he had agreed. The Montreal Express dropped his car on a siding; Norma was waiting with a buckboard to drive him the five miles to the lake. He was so preoccupied with his own affairs that he glanced at her without seeing her and gave her an embrace and a kiss that were indeed family-like in absent-mindedness.

"Well, and how goes the love-making?" he asked, as they set out.

"Oh—so—so," replied she.

"That's good." His mind was back upon his own affairs.

"I've long felt," said she, in her wise old way that had always amused him, "I've long felt that love is one of the—one of the side issues of life —the dessert, perhaps—or, maybe, more—but

certainly not the whole banquet—not by any means."

As she had paused, he saw he was expected to say something. "Really," said he.

"No," mused she, "love is rather the compass of life—but not ship or voyage or port. But—you look tired." She put her hand sympathetically on his. "It's as Joe so often says. You ought to amuse yourself."

"Amuse myself?" he echoed satirically. "Why, I never learned how."

"Nor any other man who ever amounted to anything," cried she with a sudden change that was an illustration of the much derided illogic of women—an illogic that is simply a surface clash between what they are pretending in speech and what they are really thinking in their hearts.

"What does 'amount to anything' mean?" inquired her amused father.

"I don't know," confessed she. Then she added with curious emphasis. "But I do know what 'amount to nothing' means."

Her father glanced quickly at her, as quickly

glanced away. "Life," said he, "is a series of such hard dilemmas as that. But—happiness is best."

She shook her pretty head positively, "No," she said.

"What then?"

"To strive for what one most wants."

"Not to get it?"

"Oh, yes—to get it. And then to want something else—something higher and harder—and to get that."

Murdock laughed. "Poor Joe!" he exclaimed. Then he betrayed that he had not been an attentive listener by asking again, "How goes the honeymooning?"

She, piqued, replied carelessly, "The mosquitoes and flies are particularly bad this year."

"Mosquitoes and flies! How romantic the young ones are nowadays. You could think of such things when you had the woods and the lake and—each other."

"We could," replied she. "Look at my face."

There were a few indistinct, red marks on her

clear skin. "Frightful," said he. He patted her on the shoulder—a tribute to the pleasure her beauty gave him. Then he added, "I suppose Joe is horrified because you are so disfigured."

She sobered with curious abruptness. Presently she said, with an effort, "Can't you stay a day or two?"

"No," he answered. "We must be off to-night. I'm sorry, but I can't delay. I have important business at Saint X."

At his positive refusal she looked relieved; but she said, "We hoped you'd stay. Joe'll be sorry."

"Then you do like it here."

"Of course," protested she, with enough veneer of enthusiasm to deceive one so preoccupied. "And Joe's crazy about it. He wants to stay on until October."

"Well—why not? There's no reason on earth why you should go back. You'll have to begin life soon enough, at best."

A queer little smile played about her lips. She looked straight ahead, as if driving required all her attention; she was betrayed by a deep rut

which there was no excuse for her not avoiding. The heavy jolt threw him against her, brought his eyes very near her face; he could not have avoided seeing a tear on her cheek, or noting how hollow and circled her eyes were. He put his arm around her. "You are not happy, Norma," he said tenderly. "Aren't you well? Doesn't it agree with you here?"

"What nonsense!" she cried, with forced gaiety. "Why, I'm perfectly well—and just as happy as it's possible to be."

He eyed her unbelievingly. "As it's possible to be?" he insisted.

"Yes, indeed," she insisted.

Still, he did not believe. "Probably they've struck the first rough bit on the road," reflected he. At any rate, the less interference the better. He rather expected to see signs of the same perturbation in Joe; but Joe, handsome and healthy in boating flannels, was clearly the wildly happy bridegroom of song and story. He greeted his bride as if he had not seen her in a year; and, as he and Murdock talked, Murdock noted that

his eyes were always wandering to her to flash passionate admiration at her. But Norma, seated at the water's edge and idly tossing pine sprays and cones upon the waters, did not return her husband's ardent glances. She did not lift her eyes once; and Murdock, observant now, saw that the lids were almost as blue black as if they had been bruised; also, there was a pathos in her expression that went straight to his heart.

"Do you think Norma is quite well?" he asked —she was out of hearing.

"Well? Rather!" exclaimed Joe. "Why, look at her. She enjoys it here, except she isn't so good an idler as I am. There's an art you ought to learn, Murdock. What's the use of all that sweat and struggle? Norma, there, is always talking of doing something—being of use to the world, she calls it. She thinks that big, handsome wife of Arthur Ranger's is a model. And she has great schemes for me to rush about making a name for myself." He stretched his symmetrical length still more lazily. "But not I.

I'm going to be happy—and to teach her happiness."

Murdock studied his daughter's regular, strong profile. "She's got a lot of will power, Joe," he warned. "Nobody ever could do much with her."

Joe smiled. As related to himself, he would not have had Norma altered. His interest in her was purely physical; what went on in her mind was important only as it gave color and variety and animation to her features and to her body. In Norma as related to others, however, he had in mind some rather radical alterations. He was not an aggressive snob, because he had been bred in the belief that to be a Degarmo was to be one of the world's small coterie of "best people" and that, therefore, caste was no more worth thinking about than any other matter irrevocably settled and settled right. But, Norma, a Degarmo now and not bred to it, must be taken in hand. In dress and manners she was "all right"; but her ideas ran along vulgar lines—not her fault, but the result of too much association

with Madelene Ranger, a female doctor, and the university set at Saint X with its eccentric ideas of "doing something." In Joe's opinion a lady might patronize and suggest, but could not herself do. It was woman's position to be beautiful physically, always dressed in fashion, politely occupied with her social duties. Norma was to go into society, in New York and London, and they would cut Saint X out altogether except occasionally as a place for a few weeks of absolute repose in the spring and fall. He would show Antoinette that he had made no mistake in selecting a wife.

He thought Norma too simple in her tastes. She must be taught luxuriousness. In fancy he wandered with her among the shops of the Rue de la Paix, helping her select the more intimate parts of her wardrobe, the costly, filmy, sensuous things that stimulate jaded appetites. He would add to her natural physical charm the charms of environment, the arts of suggestion, which had attracted him to the women of his bachelor days.

"We'll go abroad in the fall," Joe continued aloud.

"I thought Norma spoke of staying on at Saint X," said Murdock, absently.

"She'll give that up," answered Joe, confidently. "She talks of going to the university—of entering one of the trades classes. But what would *I* do? . . . No, we're going abroad —to spend the fall in Paris and the winter in the Riviera or Egypt."

But Murdock had withdrawn the little attention he had been giving Degarmo and was closeted with his own thoughts. That day dragged drearily for him. He took small interest in the Adirondacks which seemed to him as tame as a park adjacent to a city. And Degarmo bored him. He had never been in such close intimacy with him before, had simply accepted him on general report and on his appearance of the well-dressed, well-mannered, educated gentleman. But he was now in the mood to take note of him, and soon estimated him as one of those men who are like a carefully cultivated thin soil that has

to be constantly renewed, to keep it from failing altogether. "No doubt Norma regards him as a prodigy," thought Murdock. "Another proof of the power of the spell of the one note from one string. I hope, for his sake, she won't weary of hearing it." That there was no immediate danger of Joe's wearying of uttering the note seemed obvious.

It was Joe's skill at the note that had won her; and it had evoked such tremendous response in her sensitive nerves and vivid imagination that for the time she had cared to hear nothing else, could have heard nothing else distinctly. She had easily mistaken his taciturnity for reflectiveness. How was an inexperienced child to know what few mature people realize—that men of ideas, men of intellectual activity, are always talkative, can no more keep silent than a spring can keep from bubbling over? What he did say had never been silly, had been usually clever, often witty, always put in the superficially attractive form which enables fashionable people to conceal their vacuity from those who meet them only occa-

sionally. How was she to know that he was simply passing along the ideas, the quaint expressions, the epigrams, he had picked up in his twenty years of journeying about the world; that in all his store there was nothing of his own make?

"I am not well," she said to herself over and over again. "There must be something wrong, or I should not feel so weary, so out of humor with Joe—for I love him—I *love* him!" That word sounded hollow now, the hollower the more loudly it was uttered; and this seemed to her further evidence that she was somehow physically ill. She did not understand her own sensations, did not realize that her heart-sick feeling was protest and revolt against a conception of love which made of her a mere servant to the sensuous imaginings of a mind atrophied by disuse to the primitive activities of appetite. She could not understand why at times love for him surged up in her with more than its former delirious fire of insatiable longings, of dreams beyond the farthest horizon of thought, why these tidal

waves were succeeded by weariness, distaste for him, for herself, for life, a desire to fly from him. "It is very strange," she thought. "I suppose it must be some disease that comes with married life." And she wondered whether she would have the courage to consult her friend, Doctor Madelene, about a matter so intimate. She felt her inexperience must be enlightened; and, as her mother was unthinkable, there was none but Madelene.

"Let's not go back just yet, Norma," urged Joe, late in the afternoon.

Her heart sank at the very suggestion of lingering. "We *must* go, dearest," she said. "I don't like to confess it, but I'm not exactly well."

"Absurd!" cried Joe. As they were in the privacy of their own tent, he had her in his arms; she was the more firmly convinced of her own illness because his arms about her, his fingers stroking her cheek or pushing languorously into the meshes of her loose thick hair, were giving her no pleasure but a sense of captivity, of the dog in the treadmill. "Why, there isn't a fiber

of this beautiful body of yours that is not healthy."

She gently freed herself with a strained apologetic smile. "Please don't insist. I really must go." She looked at him wistfully. "Besides, I'm afraid you'll get tired of—of just me."

His laugh was intended to reassure her. It never occurred to him that she might have grown tired of just him. "What a child it is! Why, I can't bear to think of you out in the world again. I want you all to myself. I understand why the men put the women they love away in harems. If I could do it, no man should ever see my little beauty again."

She, with her face turned to hide its tell-tale expression from him, was reproaching herself for not liking this. Didn't she belong to him entirely, absolutely, irrevocably? Oughtn't she to feel that all she was and had belonged to him alone?

"But I can't hide you away," he went on. "And I suppose I've got to face the ordeal of sharing you with others sooner or later"

At that she winced, flushed with a feeling of shame—yet, why should she feel shame?

"However," he ended, reluctantly, "if you *really* wish to go——"

"I really *must* go," she interrupted, eagerly; and, though it was the truth, she felt that she had told him a falsehood. Only a month married, and already she was beginning to say the half-true things that ought to be wholly true, but are not. What a seducer to lies and deceptions is a conscience with an eternal demand for the ought-to-be! "Then, too," continued she, thoughtfully, "I think the idleness of our life here is preying on me."

Her husband laughed. "Idleness! Why, you're not quiet a minute. House work, tramping, boating. You're at it from morning till night. Now *I've* been really idle."

"I call it idleness," replied she, "when I'm not doing anything that leads anywhere. I know, you say it bores you to think what you're doing might possibly be useful. But I don't believe you."

"You wouldn't have me competing with the poor devils who have to work for a living, would you?" teased Joe. "No, indeed," he added, serious intent under his jesting manner. "People of our sort ought to make work for others. To do it ourselves is to cheat them."

Norma took this gravely, was puzzled by it. "I never thought of that before," said she. "It sounds reasonable. I know it isn't, but I must work it out. I don't wish to do anything that would make it harder for others to live."

Joe frowned. "Norma, my dear," said he, with the patronage of his twenty years more than hers, "don't make wrinkles for yourself, bothering about such things. We're lucky enough to have been born into a lot where we can enjoy life and never work or worry. Let's thank God, and make the most of it."

"Do you think God intended some to work all the time and others never to work at all?"

How serious she looked! How simple-minded —and how sweet of her to take such matters to heart! He caressed her hair, as he answered,

smilingly. "Probably—since that's the way of the world."

"I feel, Joe, that we're put here to make the world better, that it's an estate we ought all to labor to improve." His look was so disapproving, that she hastened to add, "You know, I always told you I felt that way. And I dream every day—have dreamed ever since loving you made me begin to think seriously of life—have dreamed of how we'd work together, doing our share of the improving. Yes, we're going to enjoy life, Joe—for, there's no real enjoyment unless one is at work."

"We'll see, we'll see," was all he said. It irritated him a little to hear her talk in this way—not much, for the sound of her voice, no matter what she said, gave him the same pleasure he felt in gliding his fingers over her firm, vital flesh. He smiled away his irritation by thinking how differently she would feel and talk once he had put her to school in the "great world" where such vulgarities as ambition and work were ranked in their proper place—the world of ladies and gen-

tlemen, leading the life that was the evidence of their superiority to the masses of their fellow beings. "She's really never seen anything of the world," he reminded himself. "Naturally, she's under the influence of her surroundings." He remembered that, while he was by inheritance from the non-toiling generations and by lifelong environment a gentleman, she was in the first generation away from toil, with her father, still a young man and of dominating personality, setting an example of labor. "Of course, Murdock's a gentleman, in a sense," thought he. "He's been to college, and all that. But he's not a gentleman by birth, though I believe his father did go to some academy or other. Still, we can't expect much of these new families until the toiling generation is under ground—hardly until the third generation. I suppose I'll have to combat Norma's notions all our lives."

This, however, did not distress him. The combat would be intermittent and mild, after the first year or so. One advantage of marrying a woman so many years younger—the greatest ad-

vantage after the fact that her charms would be young and fresh at least until he had passed into old age—was that her character was unmoulded, would be what he chose to make it. To find a congenial character might have been impossible; to make one would be easy, for Norma would continue to look up to him as an authority. As for the rubbish about his making a career, he would bring her round to realizing that to be Joe Degarmo was a career already made; that he had been born to a distinction beyond any that could be achieved by the sweaty strugglers in the arena of ambition; that it was for the smiles and the recognition of the people in the boxes, whereof he was one, that those toiling chaps exerted themselves so strenuously. While these thoughts were drifting through his brain, she was lying in his arms, her cheek against his. If he could have seen into her brain, he would have been astounded at the storm raging there—the doubts of him, the reproaches of herself, the anger at her feeling of repulsion toward him, of antagonism instead of companionship. But he

could not see. And how was he to know that her forced and eager return of his caresses was simply repentance, remorse, a striving to make duty do service where desire was shrinking and shirking?

III

WHEN the returning bride and groom drove into the Degarmo grounds and came in sight of the big old house, Norma discovered that she had been assuming it would be open in its entirety and ready to receive them. Her face fell, as she saw that only the west wing was open—only the part always kept in readiness for temporary tenancy. She glanced furtively at her husband; the expression of his eyes and mouth warned her that, if there was to be a peaceful beginning of their real life together, she must say nothing just then.

Next day she began to talk of the future, basing everything on an implied idea that they were to stay on at Saint X. Joe neither assented nor disputed; he simply let her talk. A few days of this; then she discovered that he had given the three house servants notice that they would not

be wanted after October first. She decided that the issue must be joined. "I've been talking with father," began she. "He says you can easily get to Congress. And I know you'll soon be a bigger man than Senator Scarborough."

Joe with difficulty concealed the wound to his vanity; what a topsy-turvy brain this wife of his had, comparing him, *the* Degarmo, with a cheap-joke politician, and one viewed askance by all the respectable, fashionable people.

"I'm going to begin to learn about politics," proceeded she.

"For God's sake, don't!" exclaimed her husband, his manner all mockery, his meaning all earnest.

"I must," she persisted. "It's to be our career." And she snuggled into his lap.

"We'll see—we'll see," said he, more amiably. "When we come back from Europe——"

"Why, I thought that was settled," she cried. They were out walking and had seated themselves by the roadside to rest and enjoy the lovely late summer panorama of hills and valleys and

river. As she spoke, she drew away from him, so that she could gaze into his face.

"So it is, nightingale." He refused to meet her glance.

"And we are to stay on here."

"After we've been happy together among the Italian lakes and in the Riviera. You must see Egypt, too."

She rose, resumed the walk. He lazily followed her, lighting a cigarette as he came. She wheeled on him. "Joe," she said, her manner at once timid and resolute.

"Yes, dear."

"Is it true that you've given the servants notice for the first of October?"

"I wrote from camp. It's only decent to give them a chance to place themselves."

She walked beside him in silence. When they were almost down to the level, she said, with a deep blush, "There's a reason I haven't told you—a reason why I can't go this winter."

It was his turn to halt sharply; for it was impossible to misunderstand her tone and expres-

sion. "Why didn't you tell me before?" he demanded, almost sternly.

She hung her head, and suddenly looked like a child. "I don't know," she murmured, crimson with shyness. "I don't know." There were the beginnings of a smile in her eyes. She had been treasuring this secret and imagining often how surprised and happy he would be, when she should let him in to share it with her.

"It mustn't be!" he exclaimed, the master in his voice.

She slowly lifted her eyes, wondering, dazed.

"Perhaps—after a while," he explained, somewhat confused by the wondering innocence of her eyes. "But I can't have your figure marred. Besides, what do we want with that sort of thing? They'd only be in the way, would take you from me. I think the working classes ought to have the children. There's nothing in it for the people in our station."

Her color fled as he spoke; it came back with a rush, and she burst out, "But, Joe, I *want* it!"

"You don't realize," rejoined he. "It'll cer-

tainly injure your figure, change you from a girl into God knows what sort of looking woman. Anyhow, it'll spoil your freshness. You love me, don't you?"

"You know I do," she replied, her cheeks hot, her eyes full of entreaty.

"Then you'll have this attended to. We'll go on to New York at once."

She lowered her eyes, her head. Presently she walked on, he accompanying her. During the rest of the journey there was an occasional outburst from him on the subject of the follies and inconveniences and dangers of maternity, to which she did not reply. When they reached the gates of the Degarmo house, she said, very quietly and calmly, "I think I'll walk a little farther, and—please, I'd like to be alone."

"That's right, think it out. Better still, talk with some woman about it. No, wait till we get to New York. Tony's the best person. The women out here are old fogies, and they don't appreciate the kind of life that's ahead of you."

Norma simply listened until he had finished,

then went on alone. She was silent and quiet because she was dazed; what Joe had said was like an earthquake shock to her. To have a child had been her dream from earliest days she could remember. As she grew up and came to see further into the meaning of the mysteries of life, it had thrilled her to think that she was a woman, set apart by nature for the great honor and joy of motherhood. To her woman meant mother; and when she learned that there were women who could not be mothers, she had begun to be haunted by the fear that she was one of those wretched accursed ones. Where other girls were suffering from that dread, born of our stupid civilization—the dread lest they should never meet the acceptable man who would be willing to undertake their support for life, she was in dread lest it should be her fate never to feel a tiny form that was flesh of her flesh clasped in her arms, against her bosom. And when she found for a certainty that her dread was baseless, she, being by nature secretive like her father, kept her secret nearly a month as a source

of deep, private and sustaining joy at a time when her relations with Joe were troubling her more than she would have admitted to herself. Now— She was in Riverside park thronged with wives and children of the workingmen—babies in "prams," babies in arms, babies tottering uncertainly along the walks, babies rolling in the grass, the faces of babies fairer than flowers everywhere, the laughter of babies ringing in her ears. She darted up one of the by-paths, flung herself on the grass and cried, her heart filling with tears faster than her eyes could empty it. Hers was deeper far than the vague moral shock of the idea that her child was already in existence and that her husband had sentenced it to death. It was the vivid anguish of a shattered dream, a shattered idol—for, she felt that she must choose between the love of her husband and her longing for motherhood. She was not one to sit in judgment upon him in a matter where he had as much right to decide as she—and in this matter it seemed to her that his right was equal to her own.

She rose, washed her face at a little drinking fountain and dried it with her handkerchief. She remembered that Madelene Ranger had afternoon hours at the hospital in the edge of the park. "I'll go to her," she decided. "Perhaps I can talk about it with her."

She found Madelene leaving—Madelene, tall and strong, a Juno, with a face like that of a woman in Barnard's sculptured dream of the day when the man and the woman shall be in all respects equal, working together for the glory of the race. Madelene was generally conceded to be the most remarkable woman in Saint X. She worked hard at her profession, yet somehow she had time to make her home a real home, a place of beauty and comfort, and effectually to superintend the care of the two healthiest, best-natured children ever seen, precocious, but not in the least pert, and to make her husband dependent upon her for everything material as well as spiritual that a man could possibly get from a woman, and to keep herself well dressed and well informed. Madelene was a miracle to the world of hap-

hazard people who have not learned that in each waking day there are fifty-four thousand seconds, each with its opportunities for happiness and usefulness if employed with intelligent method. Madelene accomplished wonders without struggle or worry or fret, and with no more evidence of the mechanism of purpose which guided her than appears in the movements of a ship sailing freely through the midst of the sea.

"Let's go by way of the park," said she to Norma. And they strolled along, Madelene pausing every few steps to speak to some mother or to peer into a baby carriage. Norma would have liked to take part; but she was afraid to trust herself to touch a baby. Nor could she bring the conversation round to what lay heavy upon her heart; to discuss so intimate a matter with anyone was clearly impossible; it would have been impossible, even had she been by nature less reluctant to confidence. But the society of so sane, so sturdy a personality as Madelene had all the effect of confidence and counsel. The power of advice is feeble, the power of example

is mighty. Madelene, living in honesty and courage, gave her the strength she sorely needed. When they separated at Madelene's gate, Norma went her way thinking that Madelene had not the remotest suspicion of the object of that walk. But Madelene, keenest of observers, had known the instant she saw the girl's face that something was wrong at home. And, as she watched Norma go, watched that graceful carriage which made her a delight to the eye, she sighed and said to herself, "Poor child! I'm afraid she's had a glimpse of the feet of her peacock, and has heard his voice."

Norma resorted to no diplomacy. She astounded her husband by appearing before him in his sitting room, with pale, determined face and steady eyes, saying, "Joe, I've been thinking over what we were discussing. I've decided that I must stay on here."

In all Degarmo's dealings with women theretofore he had always had them at disadvantage. Naturally he did not immediately see that his position relative to her, this woman, his lawful

wife, was just the reverse of all his previous experiences. "Come here," he invited, stretching out his arms and looking and speaking as if she were a little child.

She came slowly, seated herself on his knee. There was that in her expression which made him instinctively refrain from putting his arms round her. The person seated on his knee and regarding him so steadily and so gravely, as if from behind a veil, was not a child, was—— He wondered uneasily just what she was.

"Why do you look at me like that?" he asked.

"Because I was trying to decide whether you really love me, as you say and think."

"So you think a man proves his love for a woman by giving in to her whims?"

She did not reply.

"You are very young, dear," he went on. "There are a great many things about life that you couldn't possibly know as yet. In those things you must trust me."

"I do," she said, simply.

"Very well. Then we shall go to New York to-morrow."

"I cannot."

"Norma!"

"I cannot. I don't know just why. But there's something that won't let me."

He made an impatient movement; she rose and seated herself at a little distance. "It is settled," he said, firmly. "We shall go."

Again she was giving him that steady gaze of unalterable denial.

"It is settled," he repeated.

She shook her head sadly. "Please don't, Joe. I can't go—and it—it *hurts* to clash with you."

"Be careful, dear," he said, with the kind of gentleness that is ominous. "If you were more experienced you would appreciate how unwise it is to defy your husband, to put his love to such a strain."

"Do you mean that, if I refused to do what I could not do, you would not love me any more!"

He could not well say yes; if he said no, what

would become of his authority? He said nothing.

"Aren't you afraid of how it might make *me* feel, if you were to insist on my doing what I couldn't do?"

He avoided her gaze. He parried her thrust into the very heart of his egotism with, "You will thank me some day for having insisted. Tell me, Norma, why can't you go?"

She tried to speak, could find no words in which to express the emotions that were compelling her to stand fast. Suddenly she dropped to her knees, hid her face in the folds of his dressing gown and sobbed bitterly. "Joe—please, dear—don't ask it."

Joe stroked her hair tenderly. But he was not relenting. While they were talking, he had been realizing how foolish it was for a man to try to enforce upon a wife an authority a mistress would not for an instant question. For the first time he felt the rude chafe of the marriage bond. And back to him came all the cynicisms he had thought and uttered in the years of his jealously

guarded freedom, cynicisms about the fatuous folly of a man's marrying and, so, handing himself over captive to a woman—the cynicisms that were current in his set and that his sister had repeated to him when she was dissuading him from "making a fool of himself." It certainly did begin to look as though his confidence in his superiority to his young and inexperienced wife, in his ability to make his will at all times and in all matters her law was of a piece with the fatuities into which passion had led other men. But no —— "Impossible," he said to himself. "She's simply in a stubborn mood. Women have those cranky spells, especially at such times. She'll come round. D——n it, she's *got* to!"

And he stroked her hair and soon was kissing the white soft, deliciously curved nape of her neck. Like an inspiration it flashed over him that the thing to do was to send for Tony and have her bring Norma to reason.

Aloud he said: "Let's think no more about it at present." He lifted her up into his arms. One of his hands dropped to her ankle, to her foot.

"What a great coarse boot for such a fine, delicate little foot," he laughed. "You ought never to wear anything but graceful slippers and the thinnest cob-web silk stockings. When we get to Paris I'll show you a place where they have the most wonderful things of that sort—things that make even a respectable woman understand why some women will sell their souls to get them. With your taste, and your instincts for the softest luxury, and your beautiful face and figure—— By next spring there'll be nobody in the whole world to compare with my Norma."

. . . . . .

That night he telegraphed for his sister—he always used the telegraph, which saved him the exertion letter writing involved. And Tony, having nothing to do but things she would rather have left undone, and having by no means given over the idea of rescuing her brother from "that pretty little nobody," had her maid forthwith prepare her for the journey. It was really no exertion to travel. Her maid, Bernice, was a

"perfect wonder at making me comfortable." All she had to say was, "Bernice, nous partons demain." Bernice would reply, "Parfaitment, madame," and Antoinette would straightway dismiss the matter from mind, knowing that at the hour at which the best train departed, Bernice would have her ready to the last and least appurtenance to the voyagings of a woman of fashion, would put her into the most comfortable compartment, if by chance a private car was not available. Tony, being shrewd and far-sighted, had gone to the temporary trouble of arranging once for all the whole mechanics of her life by trying out servants until she had secured four faithful and competent lieutenants—a secretary with a memory, a housekeeper who knew what cleanness and order meant, a butler who did not get drunk and a chef who did not steal. Thenceforth her routine moved with precision and without friction or extravagance—for while she seemed the embodiment of careless prodigality, she spent lavishly only upon herself and got what was for her purposes full value for every dollar

—a secret of her character which no one but Bernice penetrated.

Joe met her at the station, and on the way to the house, bluntly laid the whole situation before her. "Give her a good, straight talk, Tony," he urged in conclusion.

Tony's brilliant eyes were laughing at him. She rarely permitted any other outward sign of mirth, as wrinkles in the skin soon make themselves permanent after thirty-five. "So," said she, "you've found out that a wife isn't *exactly* like 'les autres.' . . . Well, she's in the family now. I'll do my best. But——"

As she hesitated, he burst out, impatiently, "Oh, trash! You can bring her to reason. All she needs is to have the way of good sense shown her, and I can't talk to her as another woman can."

"Still——" Again Mrs. Houghton halted.

"What is it?" inquired Joe, anxiously.

"No matter. We'll see."

Norma's greeting was almost too cold for politeness. She knew how much influence this sis-

ter had with her husband, how profoundly he respected her intelligence and her worldly wisdom; and she was intensely jealous of it and of her. Degarmo would have been furious had he overheard the conversation between his wife and his sister, or rather, Antoinette's monologues, rarely interspersed with enforced monosyllabic responses from Norma. Mrs. Houghton simply laid before the girl her own view of life—the commonplace view of the commonplace people who accept without question and live the silly, vulgarly showy life assigned by custom to wealth early in the career of the human race and never changed—because that mode of living involves the least thought and exertion, and places those who live it most completely at the mercy of those who fatten off them. To Joe these lengthy disquisitions would have seemed purposeless; in fact, it was Tony's shrewd way of discovering her hostile and tightly enshelled sister-in-law's character and ideas. She knew that to get on confidential terms with Norma was impossible; she resorted to the strategy of the flank attack. Setting forth the

philosophy of life as handed down to "people of the decent sort" from cities buried miles deep under the alluvial deposits of Asiatic plains, she would be able to see by Norma's expression what her thought was and also how strong was the character in which that thought was rooted. To get at anyone's views, state your own aggressively; it is not in human nature to refuse the challenge.

As Tony talked, Norma's tranquillity took on a cloudier and cloudier aspect until it was soon storm-black, and the brief responses to which she had the marvelous self-restraint or modesty of personal opinion to restrain herself were like discharges of lightning. At the end of an hour Tony was intensely amused by her evident repulsion and disdain. To Degarmo's fashionable sister the opinion of Norma—a child, inexperienced, bred in vulgar surroundings—was of about the same value as the buzzings and flutterings of an impaled fly. "Physically she's unusual—there's no denying it," thought Antoinette. "But she's better fitted to be a governess than to be

Joe's wife. Patience, and he'll be through with her. What idiots their passions make of men!"

To Joe she announced after four days of exploration, "As I feared, she's steeped in bourgeois morality, Joe. You can do nothing with her."

"Why do you say that?" he demanded, angrily. "You're set against her, Tony. You make no allowances for her youth and bringing up. Besides"—— Here Joe halted, reddened, blurted—"d——n it, a man doesn't want his wife to be too loose in principles. It's not every woman who has the steady head to have liberal ideas—and take it out in thinking, as you do."

Tony's expression was quizzical. "What do you know about me, anyhow, my dear blind brother?"

"Nothing," said Joe, hastily, and with some nervousness. "And I don't want to know."

Tony laughed outright. "How I do admire the profound and sincere liberality of men," said she. "You want this wife of yours to be—no better than she should—where you are concerned,

and a puritan toward all the rest of the world. That can't be, Joseph. Upset her principles, disillusion her about yourself, make a woman of the world of her, and she'll treat you as sophisticated women of her ardent temperament usually treat their husbands. She's got a great deal more tenacity and firmness than you have. With her energy—what a dance she'd lead her poor, worn-out husband!" And she blew a cloud of smoke from her cigarette into his sullen, irritated face.

"Really, Tony," retorted he, "you must be careful. You're getting more and more pronounced in manners. There's a limit, you know. It's like the habit of rouging; a woman keeps piling on more and more until she becomes—offensive."

"Don't let Norma infect you with her class morality," cautioned his sister. "But, let's not wander from the point. You might as well let her have her way——"

"Never!"

"You may like family life, once you get into it. How do you know? But, whether you like it or

not, she's going in for it—strong. And you're a fool not to encourage her. Listen to me, Joe. You're a good twenty years older than she. When you're a bald-headed, shriveled, shaky wreck of fifty-five, she'll be about my age and if she becomes sophisticated, will look younger, because the women nowadays know enough to take themselves in hand earlier. It wasn't until I was nearly thirty that I realized what youth meant and how it could be prolonged. I've done fairly well, I think, considering my late start." She was posing before a large glass set into the wall, and it would have been impossible not to pardon the complacence of the glance she directed at her graceful and charming image. She had keen eyes for her defects as well as for her charms, and, so, got herself together to withstand the most severely critical gaze. "Yes," she went on, "at thirty-five, she'll be even more attractive physically than she is now. If you have your stupid, selfish, short-sighted way, she'll become expert in the use of her snares and nets. Don't fancy, Joe, she'd be forever content to cast

in the monotonous old domestic horsepond, with the wearisome certainty that the only game would be her dull old husband."

Joe was pulling glumly and reflectively at his mustache. Already there was a spot near the crown of his head where the hair showed thin in the glass; and whenever he was up later than usual it depressed him to see in his shaving glass the outcropping of wrinkles and faint forewarnings of the gray shadows of stealthily on-creeping old age.

"You're at the edge of your autumn," continued his sister. "She's just begun her spring, with all of it and all of her long summer—and autumn—and Indian summer—before her."

"Um—m," grunted Joe.

"Of course, it won't be long before you'll not care especially about her—except as she bears the family name. Still, on that account, you'll want her to be at least not a pattern scandal."

Joe winced. He had sunk back in his big chair, as if beaten down by her arguments. He felt old and he would not have dared meet his

sister's merciless, mocking gaze, so certain was he that his eyes were betraying the fact that haunted his solitary hours.

"Now," continued Tony, "you can't hope safely to transform her into a woman of the world. Why try? Why set her against you? No—no, Joe, old man—don't stir her up. Let her jog peacefully along, and give her a good, heavy, steady burden of domestic cares—children and so forth."

Joe continued to reflect. Tony had convinced him; but, used to having his way in all his desires, especially in his whims, he could not yield at once. He had pictured Norma a leader of fashion, a cynosure of the despairingly envious glances and thoughts of other men, an ever fresh and ever subtler stimulant to his own jaded desires. "What a d——n fool I was to marry!" he said to himself. But overtaking the thought came a rush of the intoxicating aroma from her young loveliness, an appeal to each of his five senses and, in addition, an appeal to the sixth sense; that is, the other five combined. It was

the elusive appeal of her to that sixth sense that made him secretly her slave. Aloud he said, "There seems to be something in what you say, Tony. It's not a bad idea to think of the future."

"Don't educate your wife for some other man."

Degarmo shrank from the frank brutality of this, but it was effective. Then and there he slammed the door on his aristocratic dream, and resolved that his wife should be securely his. He looked gratitude at his sister. "Mother was right, Tony," said he. "You've got the brains of the family."

"It's a pity you haven't," retorted she. With a serious look in her cynical eyes, she faced him. "How *can* you!" she said, contemptuously.

He flushed. "What now?"

"How can you be content to dawdle along and spend your life in playing at the poor little game the women have invented because the big game is denied them and they must do something? As I watch the men in our set, I can think of

nothing but silly little white mice twirling in the wheel at the end of their cage."

"That sounds like Norma."

She elevated her handsome shoulders and lit a fresh cigarette. "When you get Norma's burden well adjusted, you'll be free again. That's what *I* want. I miss you horribly. Houghton is such a bore, and besides, I can't speak out freely, be my natural self, with anyone on earth but you."

"Stay on here with us."

"Until to-morrow morning—the first good train. I don't like this latest fad of yours any better than she likes me."

Joe stood and took her by the shoulders. "Look at me, Tony. There! You understand a great deal about human nature, especially woman nature. But there's one thing you don't understand."

"Really?"

"Yes—really. You don't understand the—the sort of thing Norma and I are to each other."

"You mean, I don't appreciate it." A hard

look came into her eyes. "No, I don't," she said dryly.

But Joe for once—for the first time—did not mind the sarcasm. "The interesting thing is," he went on, "that I didn't dream it was in me. What the devil is this thing they call love, anyhow?"

The hard look slowly faded from his sister's eyes. "What, indeed?" said she. Two tears were glistening in her long lashes. She turned sharply away.

IV

BUT oracles may not retract or revise. While reflection only strengthened his conviction that Tony was right, still, as Norma's oracle, Degarmo hesitated to strike such a serious blow at his prestige as a "giving in," however indirect and carefully disguised. It was while he was still debating that his father-in-law served notice on his mother-in-law that she must begin divorce proceedings, as he was determined to be free as soon as the courts could release him. Joe did not blame Murdock; he had long suspected that Murdock would not continue to the end with a woman so utterly out of sympathy with him. But, when Mrs. Murdock, with a view to enlisting him to help her fight off the divorce, pictured to him the possible consequences of such a scandal to Norma and the child—how it might kill her and bring the child into the world an idiot, perhaps a motherless

idiot—Joe forgot all about oracle and prestige, sped to New York, and induced his father-in-law to postpone.

It was no easy task, as Murdock, expert in the ways of destiny, appreciated to the full how dangerous it is to alter a plan, no matter what plausible reason destiny, ever craftily plotting to cheat man of his desires, may put forward. But Murdock was weak on his Norma side, and Joe won. He had gone to New York in a panic; he had negotiated with the inflexible Murdock in terror. The return journey was like smooth sea, cloudless sky and favoring winds after a tempest that has all but foundered the ship. "Now for home!" he said to himself, jubilantly, as he left Murdock's club and was out of sight of that stern and bitter countenance. Home! He smiled to himself, and at himself, as he thought what a simple, old-fashioned meaning that word home now had for him—how much of a kind of charm of which he would not so long before have denied the very existence, how much of sentiment he would have sneered at as sloppy sentimentality,

how much of a comfortableness he would have derided as "bourgeois."

Swift upon his home-coming was the railway accident in the Adirondacks, with Norma and the whole Murdock family summoned to wait on and on near Murdock, hovering between death and life. When she first went, he had a sensation of relief. It would be a pleasure to try bachelor life again; he had been casting longing glances back upon his bachelorhood ever since she told him the appalling news that his mistress was to become a mother; was to transform him into that vulgar, bourgeois thing, a father. It would be a delight to get the perfume of petticoats out of the house for a while. And so it was, for the first week. Then Joe began to realize that Norma had been a great deal more than his mistress, than a plaything for his hour of passion.

With the aid of several competent and devoted servants, Joe had kept house in his bachelor days in a way that made him proud of himself and scornful of women. Both in the house at Saint X and in the apartment in New York there had

been order, comfort, taste. And when Norma went away there was no falling back, so far as he could discover. Everything seemed just the same, yet the whole routine of life was now a dull and listless performance—like a fashionable costume without style, like a beautiful dinner without salt, like a copy of a masterpiece. "The servants have grown worthless under her," was his first conclusion. But another two weeks forced him to revise; Norma, he saw, had made a new standard of living, and what he missed was her personality, her ingenious thoughtfulness, her resources of variety in the arrangement of everything—the food, the setting of the table, the flowers, the very pictures and furniture.

"Now I remember," reflected he, "she was always pottering about. I see it was to some purpose." The atmosphere of the house might be the purer for the absence of the perfume of woman, but it was the purity of distilled water.

From reflecting on these material things, he began to discover what a factor this woman had

become in his life. The mental atmosphere seemed dull. "I should die of ennui," he said to himself. "I never yawned so much. I have no interest, even in the things she took no part in." And then he recalled that his bachelor days had been monotonous, that boredom with their monotony had been his passion's chief ally in edging him on to matrimony. Yes, she had given him companionship. It was not his society that had made her vivacious; it was her vivacity that had livened him up.

"I'm afraid I've been pretty tedious and hard to entertain," he thought—and there he hit upon a great and valuable truth.

The next stage of his astounding discovery that he was an inhabitant of a new world was a heartache, a feeling of homesickness, an intense and ever intenser longing to see her again, not a longing of passion, but a longing of love. "I love her!" he cried aloud, in the loneliness of his sitting room. "I love her, and love does not mean what I thought it did. Norma, how blind, how stupid I have been!"

When she finally did return, he was afraid of her. He no longer felt the master. He realized that he had given her the custody of his happiness; that marriage had meant not merely the acquisition, under the forms of law and religion, of the beautiful mistress, the passive instrument of his passions; that it had meant a resignation of his self-ownership, a merging of his identity. "I love you," he said, under his breath, as he clasped her in his arms. "What would become of me if I should lose you?" A brief two months before, he had thought only of the disagreeableness of the inevitable time when he should lose her beauty. Now her beauty meant so little to him. "What if I should lose *you?*" he muttered, not daring to let her see how like chains of steel were the bonds that held him to her.

He had revolted from her motherhood because it would rob her figure of its virginal freshness; now he cared not at all for that. "What if it should take *her* away, should leave me alone!" he thought, and the possibility struck terror and anguish into him. Often, as they lay side by side

at night, he, brooding wakefully upon the terrible thought, would slip his hand softly upon her bosom, to feel the beating of her heart, to make sure that she was still alive; and as the strong, steady swing of the vivid current of her life reassured him, he would give a furtive but postponed sigh of happiness. Again, he would sit up in bed, would turn on the carefully shaded night lamp, and by its dim light would study her features—the coils of braided hair, so thick, so fine, so aromatic; the sweep of her lashes on her round girlish cheeks, flushed with sleep, the fine nostrils that vibrated faintly with her breath, the line of her mouth, sweet yet firm. And it was not passion that thrilled him; it was a feeling more nearly akin to religious exaltation. And when he would take her gently in his arms and she, without waking, would nestle closer to him and murmur inarticulately, it was not love of her beautiful body that thrilled him, but love of her personality—the grace and tenderness that emanated from her to envelop their life together. Again, as they sat opposite each other at table or side by side driving, he

would look into her face with a sudden dread lest she no longer cared. He had fallen easily into the habit of taking her love as the matter of course, had assumed that her chief object in life was, and should be, pleasing him. Now, he wondered that she could have cared for such supercilious selfishness as his. "She must not find me out," he said to himself. "If she does she will detest me."

Doctor Ranger—"Doctor Madelene"—was her physician; but he insisted on having Madelene's father, old Doctor Schulze, also. And he harassed him with inquiries and urgings about the approaching confinement. Everything, *everything* must be done. Schulze, with his rude and apparently unsympathetic directness, was most comforting. "Don't be an ass," said he. "She's a sound, healthy woman. Motherhood is as natural to her as any other function of the body. You might as well be wringing your hands lest she should choke to death while eating her dinner. In the name of all that's humane, don't let her see what's going on in your head. If you watched over her this

way when she was eating, she'd swallow her fork from sheer nervousness."

"I wish to God this thing had been stopped!" cried Joe.

"Stopped!" Schulze fairly shouted. "Stopped? That shows your ignorance, sir. She's a normal woman; so, each and every one of her organs has its normal appetite—her lungs for air, her stomach for food, her womb for a child. And their craving must be satisfied. In heaven's name, what does man and woman mean but child? The truth about you is you are distracted by the cravings of fatherhood, and don't know what ails you."

At this Joe laughed.

"I see you are a young man who knows little about life or about himself. You'd do well to educate yourself. Life is lover, husband, father; it isn't a way of making money or getting fools to chatter about you or selecting the loudest patterns for vests."

"You don't like my waistcoat?" said Joe, more cheerful now.

"Like it? Certainly I do. I wish I had time

to hunt for such things and money to buy them. But I haven't." And Schulze chuckled and rubbed his round red button of a nose.

For the time his common sense quieted Joe. But fears and forebodings gathered afresh when Norma's beauty of face began to grow ethereal, transparent, as if it were bathed in the dawn light of another world. Schulze assured him that this was a very ordinary phenomenon in such cases; Joe could not believe. He could hardly keep his eyes from her face; but, looking, he could hardly refrain from seizing her and showing her what was agitating his heart. She moved about like one in a dream or seeing a wonderful vision. Her smile, sweet and soft as late afternoon sunshine, had the same quality—the melancholy of farewell.

"What's the matter, Joe?" said she, catching a glimpse of the haunting terror in his eyes. "You look as if you thought I were going to have some dreadful experience."

Joe tried to force a reassuring smile.

She laughed. "Why, I never felt so well in my life. And everybody is waiting on me and

acting as if I were queen." She put her arms round his neck and he left her tears on his cheek. "Oh, Joe—isn't it *wonderful!* I've never before felt completely content. Content?" She gave a long sigh of happiness. "I thought I knew what love was, but I didn't."

"Do you love *me,* Norma?" he murmured.

"Love you? I never loved you until now. . . . Or you me, Joe. Isn't it so?"

"Yes—yes!" he cried, with a sob that was also laughter. "I *love* you!"

. . . . . .

He was walking in the grounds when the baby came. It was not expected for a day or two. That morning, the transparency of her beauty had been so terrible that he could not bear the sight of it. "She is going to leave me alone," he said to himself in agony, and he went out to pace the snow-cleared paths and, though it was bitter cold, to sweat as if it were midsummer. He heard hurrying feet behind him, stopped stock still, leaned faint and weak against a tree. It was Williams, his valet. "All over, sir," he heard,

and the voice sounded muffled and far away. He lost consciousness for an instant. Then into his swimming brain came, "And it's a boy, sir."

"She is gone, or going," he thought, "and they're keeping it from me." He went along the path to the house with Williams, through the conservatory and the morning room, up the stairs, into her dressing room. Several people were there—women, but he could not see their faces. One was holding a small bundle—was holding it out toward him. He saw a tiny, copper red body —ugly, wrinkled. He shuddered. He went—or did they lead him?—into the bedroom. She was lying there white, deathly white, and with an expression in her eyes that made the blood leave his heart. He dropped on his knees beside her and hid his face. "Oh, Norma! Norma, my love! Don't leave me. I cannot live without you."

There came a sound from her—faint and weak, but unmistakably laughter. "Whatever put *that* into your head?" she was saying, and was sliding her fingers between his face and the covers, to his lips, to kiss his lips—for, it always seemed to him

that when he kissed those slim, magnetic fingers of hers, they returned his kisses. "Why, I'm perfectly well. There was almost no pain. And, oh, Joe, isn't he beautiful?"

Some one's hand was on his shoulder—Madelene Ranger's hand—and her voice was saying, "You mustn't worry her now. Come away."

"Worry me?" exclaimed Norma. "What nonsense. I'm not an invalid. I'm—I'm a *mother!*"

And the tone in which she said it made Joe burst out crying.

. . . . . .

He could not bear the sight of the child. It seemed monstrously ugly to him, this cause of her peril and of his sufferings of foreboding. He looked at it only when she compelled; it lay against her heart with tiny arms waving blindly about. He could not kiss it, when she asked him to; but he did overcome his repugnance to the extent of advancing his finger within range of one of those hands—miserable, shriveled little hands, yet somehow large and monstrously out of proportion, like its great wobbly red head with the

furry wrinkled scalp. "Isn't he beautiful?" she insisted. Then with her sense of humor alert—"Beautiful for a baby, I mean."

"I suppose so," conceded he, trying to hide his feelings.

"But it's ours, Joe—*ours!*"

"So it is," said Joe.

She laughed again and kissed and petted it. "Your father doesn't appreciate you," she said to it. "But your mama does. So you're not his at all—just hers."

He was still more fiercely in revolt against the newcomer, the intruder, this worthless and homely trouble-causer, when he saw the expression in her eyes as she looked at it. That expression meant love—a passionate, tigerlike love, a love that would with equal readiness live or die for the beloved. And he felt that he was robbed. Between him and her now was this baby. Before it came, it had threatened to rob him of her; now that it was here, it had fulfilled its threat in another way.

V

ONE morning he found her in a low armless rocking chair before the grate fire of her sitting room. Their baby, whose first weak wail against the miseries of existence had been heard but two months before, lay flat upon his back in her lap. He was swathed in a long woolen nightgown which bulged restlessly under the impatience of his legs. She was pinching his cheeks and smothering him with kisses. This caused him to give vent to bubbling gasps of delight, and to wave his clenched fists convulsively.

When she saw Joe she lifted the baby, supporting his body with one hand and his uncertain back with the other. His big head, fallen forward, rolled from side to side, while his bright eyes stared at his father fixedly, and without the smallest gleam of intelligence. Degarmo smiled constrainedly and put one forefinger under the rather

damp chin. As the child showed that he disapproved of the change of position, she put him in her lap again and began the interrupted play.

Degarmo gazed down upon it with an irritated expression. When the nurse came with a small tub partly filled with warm water, he looked extremely awkward and out of place. A few moments of uneasy wandering among the furniture, and he seated himself in tentative fashion in a deep leather chair by the window. As he watched the two women and the baby, a feeling of isolation and sadness grew upon him. When the nurse had put the bath on the rug near the fire, she pushed to Norma's side a small table with the articles of a baby's toilet. While the child was bathing, the mother kept up a steady flow of talk at times addressed to the father, always intended for the son. She took off the long woolen gown. Then she lifted the child and laid him gently in the bath. At first touch of the water he clutched wildly and twisted his face into a crimson tangle; but the warmth and safety guaranteed by the

voice and fingers of the mother reassured him, and he was soon splashing and kicking as widely as the narrowness of his bath allowed. His face reddened and puckered as she lifted him to the blanket on her lap, but the softness of the fleecy towel consoled him. At last she was done and he lay straight and glowing, his eyes closing languidly. The talk of the mother ceased. There was silence in the room except her monotonous and soothing "Sh—h—h! sh—h—h!" as she rocked to and fro.

Joe's eyes turned away impatiently from watching her admire with the look of perfect love the beauty of the smooth round form in her lap. The skin of the child was soft and delicate. Waves of color, first pure white, then rose pink, passed across it from head to foot. They put a few clothes upon him so quietly that he only smiled and did not waken. The nurse left the room and there was no movement or sound but the slow rocking and the faint "Sh—h—h!" which accompanied it. The mother looked steadfastly at the child. The husband watched her sadly.

Just as they had begun to enter the garden of married happiness, the garden where the passion flowers either wither or transform into the never fading, never dying flowers of love—just then this baby was born. And she was more lost to him than if she were dead. A few weeks before, her eyes had in them sparkle and the frequent flash of passionate love for him. Now those eyes were turned to him with tenderness, but with a changed tenderness that pained him keenly. She was still young, she was still beautiful. But in those few days the quality of the youth and the beauty had been transformed. Her face now shone with the calmness and serenity of a mother; and the sad conviction came to him that the change was final.

As she sat in the low chair, in health and strength again, he studied the change carefully, like a physician diagnosing his own mortal malady. He had been trying to deceive himself; he could deceive himself no longer. He cared for her as before; more. But she, sitting there with her child, cared for him in a new way. The child

was first, the central figure in her life henceforth. She loved the father through the child.

In the days of their courtship she had said—and he had believed—that the passing of years would not touch them. When her hair would be gray and his hair scant, they would cling together still, excluding everything and every one else. Now all this was thwarted, brought to nought in the very dawn of their real happiness. The girl wife was gone with no hope of return. This small form had pushed in between. Those clenched hands, so feeble, had yet battered them apart. They must come to each other, anew, and through the child.

He seemed to himself to be passing away; he felt as though he were in another world, looking across a wide gulf to the fireplace where the child lay in the mother's lap. And he thought, with utter lack of hope, that he was straining his arms and his heart in vain. The instinct love which showed in her eyes as she looked at the scarcely featured child, filled him with bitterness. "And as time passes," he thought, "this will not grow

less, but greater. She may conceal it when she finds that it stabs me, but her real heart will be barred against me. She will care for me, but she will plan, and scheme, and try to control me for his sake—for their sake, if there be more."

Then he thought of his own mother. How intensely she had loved him; how often had she shielded him from his father! And he wondered how his father had felt at first. "He certainly cared for me, and he and my mother lived happily, contentedly, loving their children before themselves." Would he, too, grow to care for this little one in some such way as his wife now cared? "Probably," he said to himself, sadly. "And I shall be content, and I shall forget the happiness that might have been, in the pride and pleasure that are. But I shall be the loser, for I have lost her exclusive love. I shall have only the second place in her heart, and in the heart of the child. For he will love her first. He will be first hers; mine through her only."

While Joe was searching in vain for consolation, Norma also was thinking of the change in

their relations. She realized as fully as he that there had been a change, a transfer of love. And in a certain way she felt sorry for him, but she had no regret for the happiness he had lost, and she—Indeed, she was wondering how she could have been so blind then. For this new love was so sweet to her, so self-absorbing and self-denying! How strange, how wonderful, how satisfying was the new love—the love for this small being which was hers through the miracle of birth, through suffering to be remembered only with gladness! Flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood, yet a separate being. She realized the isolation of her husband, and yet she could not linger upon it; she was too absorbed with her son.

"My son!" she thought. "My son!" she murmured, and she bent to kiss him softly, while the joy of maternal possession thrilled through her like a strong wine. Her thoughts leaped along the years, picturing him as he would be when he could walk and talk, when he should be a school boy—youth—man!—the great man of whom she was so proud, who loved her so. The look that

came into her face, the ecstatic reflection of those delicious dreams cut her husband to the quick. He rose and stood staring bitterly out of the window at the phalanxes of snowflakes charging the bare ice-crusted boughs. And through him, like a cry of despair, boomed the thought: "She is no longer a wife. She is a mother!"

For a time Joe continued to flit in and out of her daily life, an uneasy, forlorn figure, casting a faint shadow, but forgotten as soon as he departed. Then she began to see him only at lunch and dinner—then, only at dinner—by mid-summer only two or three times a week. Occasionally she paused to say to herself, "I wonder where Joe is?" But she never paused long enough to cast about for an answer. All her time, all her thought was for this wonderful baby which, sleeping or waking, she dared not trust out of her sight. Not a night but she waked with a start, hearing that dreadful music of the Erlking luring the baby away from her. Not even the scandal —the really huge scandal—of her mother's and father's divorce roused her. That excitement

was, for her, like a brass band trying to make itself heard under the windows of an asylum for the deaf.

In September her brother Charley dropped in on his way home from the country club to say good-bye to her before going off east to school. He confided to her his suspicions that their mother was thinking of marrying again, or, rather, was being put in the way of such thoughts by her father's artful and ambitious Ex-Secretary Blyden. She listened with indifference. This irritated him. He looked her over with frankly critical eyes. "My, but you're taking on fat," said he.

She flushed.

"You *do* look maternal!" proceeded he, encouraged by her expression of deep annoyance. "Quite middle-aged in bust and beam."

"Don't be so coarse," cried she, angrily.

"I'm nothing like as coarse as you'll soon be to look at. Here's mother waking up and trying to get something like a figure back, and you pile it on as fast as she loses."

"I don't weigh twenty pounds more than I did a year ago," protested she.

"Loose flesh," replied Charles. "Bulk without weight. Worst possible kind. Well, Joe ain't the first man that's married a sylph and had her expand into a side show freak. My eyes, Norma, if you don't wake up you'll be a sight."

Norma knew he was grossly exaggerating; still there was—well, a grain of truth in these slanders. And, with her mother's fate vivid in her memory, she could not but shrink and shudder—especially as she was in face and figure "Sophy over again."

"What you reading?" continued Charles, taking her dropped book from her lap. "One of those 'Young Mothers' Guides.' Poor Joey!"

It was, in fact, one of the fifty or more books on maternity and infancy with which Norma, the "thorough," had provided herself. "You're positively intolerable to-day!" exclaimed she.

"Don't see Joe much, these days, do you?" inquired he.

She frowned sullenly. "I wish you'd go."

"Well—Mazie Bramwell does," pursued he. "Know she was back?"

"She doesn't interest me," said Norma.

"Well, she does Joe," retorted Charley. "She's brought a whole ship load of Paris dresses—and *lingerie.* She's on daily exhibition at the club—always with Joe in train. You know she wanted him, and hated you for getting him. Guess she's looking for revenge."

"I'll not listen to such—such lies," cried Norma, starting up.

"You'd better," advised the young brother coolly. "And you'd better hump yourself, too. These are dangerous days for the female rotter."

Norma rushed from the room. When she was sure Charley had gone she returned, got her book, went to sit where she could see her baby by merely lifting her eyes, could be deliciously conscious of his presence, as she read. This, for perhaps half an hour; then the graceful, alluring figure of Mazie Bramwell, in Paris dress—*and lingerie*—began to trail tauntingly to and fro between her eyes and the printed page.

A brief struggle, and she dropped the book, and began to think.

She could not deny that the baby had crowded Joe from the hearth of her heart—had even crowded him entirely out of her heart. "No, I *don't* think of Joe, of our present, our future, as I used to," she said to herself. Her eyes sought her baby's face. "How can I, now that I have him?" And the blood thrilled, and her eyes dimmed with tears of pride and love and happiness. This little stranger, whom she had introduced to life, had brought perhaps from some happy place to endure sorrows and anxieties and regrets in the flesh—this helpless being, needing attention every moment—— "I can't neglect him! It would be wicked to trust him to others. . . . No, I *will* not!—not even if I lose my looks and my husband. If that was how mother lost father, then she was well rid of him. . . . Why shouldn't Joe spend more time at home? Isn't he a father! He ought not to put the whole burden on me——" She smiled at her unfairness—"as if I'd let anybody but myself do for

the baby. . . . Poor Joe! It must be dull for him. . . . What am I to do? And he doesn't take the least interest in his son—not the least."

The reason flashed upon her. "How absurd of him," she thought. "Jealous of his own child!" Yet—— She knew that country club set well. It was of the same sort that is found in every American large town and city nowadays—idle, well dressed, good looking young people; with nothing to do since their parents did so well; with nothing to think about but mischief; drinking a great deal, flirting and gambling and gossiping—leading the fashionable life which so many hard working people view from afar enviously and about which so many hard-working writers disseminate glittering romancings. It bored Norma, as it bored those leading it; she differed from them in that she had character and energy, and so did not indolently submit to its monotonous routine of inanities. And she knew that it bored Joe. "I've driven him back to it. Just when he needed me most, I've failed him."

At six o'clock the butler brought up the usual message—"Mr. Degarmo telephones from the club that he'll not be home to dinner." She did not say, "Very well" in her wonted indifferent tone, though she said it, there being nothing else to say.

When toward midnight Joe opened the library door, he started back in astonishment; there sat Norma in evening dress. Since the baby came she had left off dressing for dinner, had kept as much of the time as she could to costumes that made her free to serve him, in however humble a capacity, at an instant's notice. A charming picture she was, with her fine shoulders bare, and her beautiful throat at its best, supporting so gracefully her shapely head. And the picture was complete when she looked up from her book with a smile. "Hello, Joe," cried she.

"What's the matter?" said he, rather curtly. "Baby sick?"

"No indeed. He's too well taken care of for that."

He lit a cigarette, dropped into a big chair,

spread himself at his ease. The faint odor of liquor came to her, mingled with his smoke. She studied his face. It was sullen and sad, bored; the lines at the corners of his eyes were very distinct. Though he had a coat of bronze on his skin, he did not look well.

"Rather late for you to be up—what?" said he. "The baby usually routs you out about dawn, doesn't he?"

"I felt lonely to-night," replied she. "I wanted to see you. I suddenly realized you weren't here"—there was just the faintest catch in her voice—"and the house seemed dreary and empty."

He glanced quickly at her. "I hate sitting about," said he, gruffly. "I can't spend my whole life watching you fool with that brat."

She laughed. "The brat being your son." She stood by his chair. "Would you mind if I—sat in your lap?"

He stared up at her.

"I don't wonder you hesitate," she went on, cheerfully. She turned slowly round. "Charley

says I'm getting a back and hips. I'm afraid it's so. I weigh more than I did."

He eyed her figure, at first rather sourly, but with a gradually softening expression. It wasn't quite so girlish as when she was exercising regularly; but it was still a very beautiful, sinuous figure. "Charley's an ass," said he.

"I'm ashamed of myself," she went on, seating herself on his knees. "I must get out and put myself in condition. I've no patience with women who let themselves go. The time to fight bust and hips is before, not after."

She was sitting up very stiff, was looking down into his eyes, a tender, alluring little smile in her eyes and about her lips. "How unsocial you are," she hinted.

"To tell you the truth, I've been drinking," explained he, shamefaced. "I smell like a bar."

She slid down against his breast, put her cheek against his. "Do you love me, Joe?" she murmured.

"More than you deserve."

"Will you forgive me?"

"For what?"

"For neglecting myself and you."

"Surely you're not tired of your plaything in the crib upstairs." He listened. "I thought I heard him cry."

She laughed. "No, you didn't. I got a nurse this afternoon."

"A nurse!" Joe sat up, held her from him where he could look at her. "Well, I'll be hanged!" he exclaimed. "Why, I thought you were dead against nurses."

"I got to thinking about—about——"

"Your figure."

"Yes," she agreed. "Joe, do you love me—still?"

He looked at her, touched her temple with his forefinger. "Now, I wonder what's going on in this little head of yours? There's something back of this."

Her eyes were clear and steady and wistful. "Only what you see," she assured him. "I want you, Joe . . . I'm the mother of your boy, but—" with her cheek against his, and her voice

so low that he could just hear—"I'm your wife, first of all. I didn't marry a father . . . I married a—lover."

"Is that in your heart, Norma?"

"In my heart, Joe."

He kissed her on the lips. "And in your life, too," said he. "Norma, you've come back!"

"Back home," she said, nestling against his breast.

She went for a long walk with Joe after breakfast the next morning. Though she thought of the baby constantly, pictured him in all manner of dire necessities, she never spoke of him. She went to the club with him in the afternoon, would have dined with him there if he had not insisted that he preferred dining at home. When he had dressed, he came into her dressing room. There was a highboy where the baby's crib had been. "Why, where's the master of the house?" he exclaimed.

"Across the hall," said Norma, with suspicious carelessness. "That's to be the nursery. Mrs. Creighton has him in her bedroom. Please hook

my back." As they started down to dinner, she said, "Wait a second. I want to say good-night to your son."

She went into the big, high-ceilinged room where the baby was sleeping contentedly. He was lying on his back, his small fists clenched upon his chest that stood up as if he had a cushion stuffed up into his night-gown. She bent over and kissed him. When she stood up straight again, Joe was beside her. She liked the look in his face as he studied the fat, pink face of his son.

"Kiss him," she suggested, "he won't wake."

Joe bent and awkwardly kissed one of the clenched fists. "Gad, *there's* a chest!" he muttered.

"Just like yours," Norma assured him. "He's you, over again—even to little tricks with his eyes and the way his ears are put on."

They went out together, and the baby was not mentioned again. She played and sang for him, and for an hour before going to bed they walked up and down in the moonlight, soothed and drawn together in a mood of tenderness by the soft air,

heavy laden with the sensuous perfume of the honeysuckles. It was as if they had just become engaged.

A week, two weeks passed, and still Norma was wife all the time and was leaving the position of mother to Mrs. Creighton. One afternoon she came home from her mother's to find Joe rolling the baby on the grass and playing with it as if he were a big Newfoundland dog. He looked sheepish at being caught.

"Amusing little animal, isn't he?" said he.

"It *is* fun to watch him grow."

"Wonderful, isn't it? Something new every day."

Norma went into the house, as if she were only mildly interested. Joe didn't dream that, as he resumed his undignified antics, disguised as studies in infant psychology, she was peeping at him from her sitting-room window.

A few more days and Joe's paternal conscience began to stir. He had his full share of male reverence for consistency; so, it was impossible for him to disclose himself frankly. It was after

dinner, and she was playing softly, while he laid curled up in the wide window seat smoking. "You don't seem to see as much of the young one as you did at first," he began.

"No," replied she, not pausing in her playing. "One hears a great deal about weaning the baby, but until I had experience I didn't know there was the equally important weaning of the mother."

"Um!" groaned Joe.

Several minutes of silent smoking and apparently absorbed playing. Then Joe again: "I suppose that's because most mothers don't need to be weaned. They're only too glad to shift it all to a nurse."

She made no reply. He resumed his astonished contemplation of his own folly in not having realized that what he regarded as weak-mindedness in Norma was in fact a very high and noble virtue.

"However," she said at length, "I'm gradually getting resigned to Mrs. Creighton."

"Um!" grunted Joe. Another long pause. "You think Mrs. Creighton's all right?"

"Rather!" exclaimed Norma, whirling round on the piano stool. "You don't imagine I'd trust my——"

"There—there—don't leap in the air," soothed Joe. "It just occurred to me that—— Well, no matter how good, and all that she is, she can't feel toward him as if he were her own child—can she now?"

"No, I suppose not," conceded Norma, with reluctance.

"They tell me," continued Joe, abstractedly, "that the first year or so of a baby's life is the most important, that then's when most of 'em are spoiled. They say they get all sort of diseases through neglect—not out and out neglect, but carelessness—and the diseases develop later on—colds and weak eyes—and indigestion—and all that. And they say it's particularly bad about their dispositions. An ill-tempered or ignorant or low-minded nurse, for instance——"

Norma watched his face as long as she could contain herself. She turned toward the keyboard with, "But Mrs. Creighton——"

"Certainly not—certainly not," Joe assured her soothingly. "I was simply making conversation."

"Oh," said Norma, sweetly.

"But, after all"—Joe sat up—"*what* do we know about this Mrs. Creighton? She *seems* a pleasant, capable woman, I grant you. But, you'd hardly select her as a companion for yourself."

Norma's fingers ran over the keys lightly. "Really, you can't expect a woman who's willing to hire out as a baby's nurse to be a prodigy in mind or manners, Joe."

"That's just it," exclaimed Joe, triumphantly. "So, I fancy, the first thing we know, the little chap'll be picking up all sorts of tricks we don't care about. He'll be talking soon, won't he?"

"He'll burst out—quite suddenly—in about a month."

"Really," cried Joe, much interested. "Really now! Isn't that *extraordinary!*"

"Oh, it's the way with all babies," rejoined Norma, carelessly.

"Um," grunted Joe, abashed. But soon he was

at it again. "If he sees much of this Mrs. Creighton, he'll talk like her. It don't look as if we were giving the little chap quite a fair chance, does it?"

Norma rose and leaned across the corner of the piano. "No, it doesn't, now that you put it that way," replied she, grave and thoughtful. "I'm so glad you said these things, Joe. The child ought to be more with us, oughtn't he?"

"That's how it seems to me," said Joe, delighted with his diplomacy.

"Do you think I ought to send Mrs. Creighton away?"

"Oh, no—not at all," protested he, settling back comfortably among the cushions. "That wouldn't be fair to *you*. But—— Well, the little chap sleeps a good deal of the time, and he's pretty regular about it."

"She couldn't do him any harm while he was asleep, could she?"

"I should say not," conceded the father, with judicial thoughtfulness and precision. "That is, if somebody who really cared about him looked

in now and then, to see that he wasn't catching cold or being fed with some rotten syrup. They tell me all these hired nurses are the very devil for syrups."

"I guess I oughtn't to trust even Mrs. Creighton too far."

"There it is!" exclaimed Joe. "You've got my point exactly. I've been thinking it over, Norma. After all, we've brought the little fellow into the world. We're responsible for him. And it does make a big difference how children are started. Gad, if you and I had been brought up by hand, as the Rangers were, I guess we'd be the better for it."

"I never shall get over my nurses," said Norma. "And I made up my mind that if I ever had children I'd bring them up myself. But," she sighed, hypocritically, "the temptation not to do it is strong."

"Yes, it is," admitted Joe. "But"—very resolutely—"Norma, we've got duty cut out for us, and we've got to try to do it."

"If you'll help, Joe. I hate a boy that's left

entirely to women. A boy needs a father, right from the start."

"I'll do my share," said he, encouragingly.

. . . . . .

And he never knew. When a man finds he can manage a woman, he begins to tyrannize and despise; but when a woman finds that she can by diplomacy seduce her husband into the ways of sanity and sense in which women walk so much more steadily and naturally than impulsive, passionate, vagrant man, she loves him the more deeply. There was all the tenderness in Norma's caresses that night, and added to it a new tenderness; for, she felt that her baby had an elder brother, one that was extremely proud of the position, jealous of its prerogatives and eager for all its responsibilities. But she did not feel entirely sure of him until he addressed her as "mother"—with a blush and a grin, as if it were a ticklish kind of joke.

She blushed, smiled, with tears welling up into her eyes. "I like that!" she said. "Don't you?"

He looked guiltily round as if he feared a burst

of mocking laughter from New York—and from his past. But he said, resolutely, if somewhat sheepishly, "Yes."

"Even if Tony heard?"

He hesitated; then, "Tony be—be jiggered!"

ENID

ENID

I

COURTSHIP

TENNYSON was the literary idol of the moment among the cultured of Lester, Pennsylvania, when the wife of its leading drygoods merchant gave birth to a daughter. As Mrs. Dr. Carmine, bearing a daughter, also, but unluckily a week earlier, had appropriated the name Elaine, Mrs. Holmes was forced to fall back upon her second choice. Thus it chanced that it was not Elaine Holmes, but Enid Holmes who grew up into one of Lester's most attractive girls. After the manner of girls preparing themselves—not exactly consciously, yet not wholly unconsciously, either—to make an advantageous bargain in the matrimonial market, Enid Holmes took careful stock of her physical

points at an early age, and, with a shrewdness that augured well for the future, proceeded to make the best of them.

By the time Enid was eighteen the Tennyson cult had long since departed, and the craze of the hour was for the weird and mysterious. Nature had dealt kindly with Enid in the matter of raw materials for taking advantage of this fascinating cult, and she was soon easily the best in Lester at it. She was neither tall nor short. She had a strangely narrow figure, that lent itself to the lines of the weird, wan and whimsical style of dress. She had a long, slim, but well-shaped neck, a small head, a thin, eager face. She had hair of an auburn hue that, without the use of dyes or chemicals or such vulgar devices, but merely by putting a little soda in the water, changed to a coppery, or, rather, bronze hue. This hair, which was abundant, she wore in a loose, expansive fashion. Looking at her you saw first the masses of hair, then the wistful, restless, light-brown eyes, then a wide, sensuous mouth, very wide, indeed, for so small a head and

face—and finally, the narrow, nervous figure, squirming intolerantly in the tight-fitting, tight-skirted dress. That figure might have been boyish, so straight and strong were its lines, but for its subtle, insinuating feminine curves, like shy hints to remind man of woman.

The general effect of Enid's pose was surpassingly good. Of all the girls, each striving according to her own taste, to make the best of her charms, Enid was the most successful in effacing all suggestion of pose. In male presence she most of the time sat silent, asking a question now and then, watching the man with eager, mysterious eyes, squirming about in her chair, and in her dress with arresting grace and charm. When she allowed herself to speak, she abruptly poured out in a low, intense voice a flood of words—no matter what; she had conversation, or rather, ideas for conversation, suitable to her physical pose, ready for all subjects likely to come up between a man and a girl.

She had reputation for intelligence and for culture. In fact, she used her brains only so

much as was necessary to round out the pose. She professed the keenest interest in literature, art, the occult. In fact, she thought only of men and of getting married—the same subjects that secretly enchained the attention of all the Lester girls.

Her father had been dead many years, leaving nothing but the life insurance, twenty thousand dollars so invested that it paid about eight per cent. In Lester, a family of two, owning their house and having sixteen hundred a year, was more than comfortable. Mrs. Holmes, an inveterate old novel drunkard, but with a streak of lazy feminine shrewdness, was regarded as a doting mother because she invested all she could spare in making Enid attractive to look at and in giving her chances to be thrown with the young men. She never spoke to Enid of Enid's marrying. When she spoke to others of it, she said that the event would be the most doleful of calamities. "I'll be left all alone, but, of course, my daughter must have her romance. What is life—what is youth—without romance?"

The lower animals are all about us, and are constantly educating their young, yet how little we are able to find out, closely though we observe, as to the schooling the mother dog gives her puppy, the mother cat her kitten, the mother bird her chick. Not less mysterious is the training the mother human gives her daughter in the essentials of the art of pleasing and teasing the man to the point where he will timidly stammer out to Miss-Shy-and-Scared-Innocence a humble petition that she let him undertake the noble enterprise of being her slave. Mrs. Holmes, apparently steeped in novelism and sentimentalism as the dyer's cloth in the dye, yet contrived to train her daughter to have not a little good sense, for all her romantic ideals. Not too much good sense—not enough, not nearly enough, to spoil her generous sweetness with any ugly tinge of calculation. No, indeed! Mrs. Holmes was not so foolish; neither was she herself calculating, except as all who have lived have learned that there are such problems as food, clothing, shelter, bills, incomes, and that these problems

play a somewhat larger part in life than they play in novels.

It was not because the young women of Lester were unusually mercenary that Walter Prescott became popular as soon as he appeared in Lester society. But, on the other hand, neither was that popularity wholly due to his being good looking and of agreeable manners.

Samuel Prescott, the father of Walter, wished to remove his stove foundry from Harrisburg to a place where his hands could live more cheaply—therefore, work more cheaply. Lester offered him a free site, release from taxes for fifteen years, a stock subscription and some other advantages. So, Walter Prescott, his father's partner, became one of the leaders of Lester society. Walter was not married, and told everyone—and believed—that he never intended to marry. But this kind of talk no more discouraged the girls than their own noisy acceptance of "modern" attacks on the institution of matrimony discouraged the boys. It is no new thing in the world for both merchant and cus-

tomer to come to market protesting—and believing, or trying to believe—that they are merely "looking round" and have no intention to do business.

When Walter appeared, Enid Holmes was visiting in Pittsburg, was intending to spend the winter there. And Walter was intending to depart in February for a tour round the world, perhaps not to return to Lester, but to take charge of the office in Philadelphia. Here we evidently have the beginnings of a plain case of romantic fatality. The world is full of interesting young men and interesting young women, young people ready to mate and suitable for any taste from the simplest to the most whimsical. There is nothing astoundingly "different" about any human being, either within or without; there is no human being who has not something peculiar and wonderful in him or her. The arrangements for pairing off, therefore, call for no special interventions of fate. But where's the harm in a little mysticism, if one fancies that sort of thing? Mrs. Holmes became indisposed; her

daughter found it out in a roundabout way and hastened home. Samuel Prescott decided to go away himself, instead of letting his son go; Walter was there when Enid arrived.

Joe Carmine brought Walter to call a few evenings after her return. Said he to Walter:

"You haven't seen that little Enid Holmes, have you? She's the town headliner—the best we've got, I think. Not much of a figure, as figures go—and yet—somehow—well, she's all right. Looks all hair and eyes and mouth. Talks a little lofty—like most of the girls nowadays—but she'll do."

Walter had inspected all the Lester offerings —of his own class, of course. He had seen nothing to shake his resolution never to be one of those "ridiculous married men, tied down to one tiresome woman and a bunch of bellowing brats, by gad." The other girls didn't amuse him, didn't stimulate him. "Just girls," he said to himself. "What's more tiresome than just girls? No sense, no originality, no variety." He had not the least confidence in Joe Carmine's judg-

ment. Still, there being nothing better to do, why not go? "You must get me away early," said he to Joe.

"We'll stay till she puts us out," replied Joe. "She knows how, she does. Take it from me."

You may be sure that Enid had spared no pains in preparing herself for the visit of one whose fame was in her ears as soon as she returned. You may be sure that the arrangement of lights in the pleasant little parlor of the Holmes house was well adapted to the pose in general and to the color scheme it was wearing that evening. Walter was enraptured at first view. He thought he had never seen female so strange and fascinating. All hair, eyes and mouth, indeed. And what a thrill in the touch of that cool, slim hand, given in graceful gesture of welcome! He had rather liked girls with figure. He realized now how crude his taste had been. This boyish figure that now and then, with the most subtle and covert of hints, proclaimed itself softly and sinuously feminine.

Walter and Joe did, indeed, stay until they dared stay no longer.

"Eleven o'clock!" exclaimed Joe, as they came in sight of the jeweler's clock on the way home. "She never let anybody stay that late before. I guess she was polite because you are a stranger."

Walter did not disturb in its repose deep in his manly bosom another explanation of her graciousness.

"Wasn't I right about her?" inquired Carmine. "Isn't she a winner?"

"A very charming girl," said Walter with the kind of heartiness that is merely politeness. He was too powerfully moved to bring into view any part of what he really thought. "Such a good talker—so intelligent and well informed."

In fact, he would have found it difficult to recall even the substance of anything she had said; and if he had recalled it, he would have found difficulty in explaining why he regarded such usual young person talk as either intelligent or well informed. But he was in love—in love in the most approved romantic way—love at first

sight. And that kind of love must be, as we all know, based upon sympathy of soul and intellect, with no touch of the base and debasing physical. No, Walter was thinking of her hair and eyes and teeth and lips and long, slim neck and restless, nervous body only as one thinks of the piano when one is listening to the sonata.

"If I had money enough to marry and settle down," continued Joe, "*there's* the lady I'd ask."

Walter smothered his upflaring hatred. Said he:

"Could you get her?"

"Oh, I suppose so," replied Joe indifferently. "She's got to marry somebody, you know. And no doubt we'd fall in love with each other if we went at each other that way."

"I don't believe she'd bother with you," said Walter jocosely—with an ugly laugh.

"Well, she'll not get the chance," replied Joe. "She's what I call dangerous. So I keep away from her except once in so often. That's the way not to get messed up in a promise you can't

fulfill. Then, too, I'm like you; I don't think much of marrying. Of course, if I didn't have a home, I'd feel differently. And so'd you, I guess."

Home? Marrying for a home? The idea did not attract Walter Prescott. He was not a wanderer far from home; neither was home a vague and gold-misted reminiscence of the remote past. It was a present actuality—comfortable, correct, "Christian," but monotonous, tedious, dull; a good place to sleep, a good enough place to eat, but not suggesting any positive pleasure. He could not associate the idea home and the idea Enid Holmes.

Joe Carmine was saying:

"Ever come near marrying for a home? *I* did—once. Girl in a town near here—I sha'n't say who. She was one of those sweet, quiet creatures—made you think of firelight in winter—snowing like hell outside, everything warm and cosy inside—dear little wife waiting, making everything cheerful."

Walter nodded, laughed.

"I fell for it—thought I simply couldn't let such a chance go by. But it was a long engagement—and I got a little tired—and she took another fellow. Say, Prescott, why do they always write the teary things about his being broken-hearted over the girl he didn't get? For one of those cases, there's a million of the man who gets a grin out of life every day with thinking how he dodged marrying her—eh?"

Prescott nodded knowingly again.

"That girl of mine—you ought to see *her* home." Carmine laughed. "She didn't know anything more about home-making than—than my sister or yours. The women used to be home makers. They still look as if they could—sometimes. But it's only a look—a kind of survival like a chicken's wings that can't be flown with any more."

Prescott's thoughts ran on about Enid. Certainly there was nothing of the sweet, monotonous, dull home-maker about her—no reality of it, no pretence of it. She was a girl to give a fellow emotions—thrills. She looked interesting

—exciting—mysterious and worth exploring. She appealed to the sense of adventure.

Life—the life of conventional business and conventional sociability—life scrupulously correct, cut and dried—the life to which our individuality-hating social system condemns us—it is not as a rule accepted by youth without more or less violent spasms of revolt. It even rasps the nerves of those tamed to its treadmill so that they often long to jump the harness and caper—and occasionally venture to yield. Most of the vice in this world is sired by poverty and dammed by misery. The rest—or nearly all of it—originates in this revolt of individuality against the patterned thing. Walter Prescott—a fairly average young man in intelligence and imagination—gazed with longing eyes at Enid Holmes—why? Because she conjured in him with her loose, luxuriant bronze hair, with her eager eyes, with her wide, passionate mouth, with her slim, intensely alive figure, visions of delightful experiences, of sensations intoxicating to the nerves, of excursions from quiet, conventional Lester into

the realms of fancy and of passion. Where and what were these realms? He did not know; but that personality of Enid's played upon his imagination as the music of the Pied Piper upon the imaginations of Hamelin's children.

He saw her again a day or two later. She was hurrying along through the light snowstorm. There was fur round the brim of her little hat, fur round her neck and up against her now flushed cheeks. The long wrap had the lines of her figure; there were a few snowflakes in her loosely caught hair. And the big, eager eyes were bright and the wide mouth was rosy. He was in a rush to get to the bank before closing time; but he turned and joined her.

Such a commonplace conversation—on both sides. They laughed a great deal at things with no laugh in them. But that lack was unimportant; there was laughter a plenty, and all kinds of emotion, in their nerves. He was thinking about her, every thought a quiver. She was thinking about the same thing—herself. In love —of this kind—the man thinks, and shows that

he thinks, there is nothing worth thinking about but the woman. And the woman—is it not natural that she should accept his view of things? Prescott was intent upon Enid; Enid upon herself—upon her pose, upon the impression she was making. He wanted her; she wanted—not him, but him to want her, which is a very different matter.

"May I come to see you to-night?" asked he, leaving her at her gate.

She looked mysterious, nervous, suddenly withdrawn into the depths of her cryptic self. She was debating nothing more cryptic than whether it would be wiser to put off the pleasure that he might value it the more or to yield to her desire to pass an evening at the business a woman finds most profitable, and, therefore, naturally, most agreeable. As she was young and impatient and eager, desire won.

A fleeting, shy-bold, altogether fascinating look from the big eyes, and the wide mouth said, "Yes—do. There are so many things I want to ask you about."

As soon as he was round the corner he set off at a dead run. He reached the bank barely in time to make the daily deposit. As he was not without his vein of prudence, this infatuation for Enid did not possess him undisputedly. He reminded himself that he was only twenty-four, that the world was as yet a wholly unexplored place, that it contained many wonders, including many wonderful women.

"There's nothing in marriage, anyhow," reflected he. "And I'd be a damn fool to settle down—tie myself to a woman—begin to raise a family—when I'm not grown up. That little girl has turned my head. I must be careful, or I'll propose to her the first chance I get. And if I'm once tangled in, I'll have hard work escaping, if I should want to escape."

Enid, at home and in her own room, was looking at herself in the glass. She was in a state of exalted excitement. About him, she thought; in fact, about herself and her prospects of a triumph. "You must make yourself as fascinating as you can," she said to herself. "You must try

to be worthy of *him*." She had idealized him into a figure worthy of a novel, worthy of a maiden with a mysterious soul. She had never looked at him, the stove Manufacturer of Lester, Pa. She could not have accurately described him. But that would have been quite unnecessary. A man generally regarded as worth while was admiring her, was in the way to fall at her feet. The important thing was not the man, but his admiration, his impending adoration. While he was burning with the desire to possess, she was aglow with the desire to be possessed—or, was it rather the longing to be made to see and hear and feel how desirable she was?

All human beings, the self-complacent intellectual or spiritual classes hardly less than the others not so fortunately endowed in the matter of vocabulary to aid them in self-deception and self-glorification, are necessarily dominated by the physical. So long as the body exists, so long as it is able to imprison the soul in a world of material things, just so long will this continue to be so true. Because they have little else to think

about but themselves and the immediate and pressing cravings of their material natures, women are more material than men. And this is aggravated by the fact that their physical charms are their chief asset in the market to which they all feel that they must go. So, if the spiritual side of Enid's nature is not here dwelt upon so much as some historians would dwell upon it, that is simply because *we* are trying to get acquainted with *her*—leaving it to young Mr. Prescott to study and enrapture over her soul and its elegantly broidered garment of pose.

That evening Enid, in one of her simplest dresses and with hair like a nebulous, shimmering aureole about her slim, eager little face, sat at the piano and sang a sad, dreamy French song in a low, tender voice. The soft light of a shaded lamp flung its gentle glory upon her. Walter Prescott was so bewitched that he stood behind her and afar off, his clenched fists deep in his trousers' pockets and his strong, tallish body in an attitude of tense resistance. But when she

turned slowly round on the piano stool and fixed the big eyes upon him, her mouth tremulous with a gentle, pensive smile—when she thus climaxed her play upon the young man's emotions, he wilted into a big chair and made a last stand for liberty by compressing his lips. The words might surge up to that barrier; but pass they should not.

"I wish I knew French," said she. "You do, of course?"

"The kind they speak at Yale," replied he. "Pretty bum."

They talked along in this strain. To record it would be about as germane to what was actually occurring in that room as—well, as to record any conversation of any similarly placed couple of youngsters circling about the business for which nature has put us upon this earth. Presently she wanted him to translate the words of a song. That brought him to the piano, to stand beside her, to bend over and forward toward the music rest. His fists were clenched in his trousers' pockets. As he wrestled with the

French something wrestled with the tense arm and fingers nearest her. His conquest of the French was not notable; but the something did better with the arm. For the arm quivered, moved, advanced hesitatingly; the fingers touched her shoulder; the arm was resting lightly across her back. She looked up at him—the slim, wistful face, the eager eyes, the lips slightly ajar. He kissed her.

It was more maddening than he had fancied—giddy though his fancyings had been. "You *are* a wonder, Enid," he said—an unfair account of the impression he was making, for that impression depended not at all on words. "I'm as cracked as an old kettle about you."

She laughed—a low, gentle, passion-charged, electrifying laugh. Women of good taste rarely make the coarse male's blunder of speech at such times. They have too strong a sense of the harmonious. Also, luckily for the male, they do not listen, either; they feel.

"You mustn't," she said. "We've seen each other only twice."

"Once was enough for me," declared he, kissing her again.

She thrilled! Then she had not been mistaken in her guess at the meaning of his agitations and incoherencies when he called with Joe Carmine. She was loved!—at first sight!—by a man of the sort a girl could be in every way proud of—a man desirable and satisfying both to conventionality and to romance. Her great eyes fell to dreaming. Said she—and how enchanting, how mysterious she looked!

"I don't understand myself. I—I've always disliked being touched."

What womanly delicacy! Yes, indeed—he knew, without her telling him, that those supersensitive nerves—was there anything to her but nerves?—just nerves, to quiver, to utter the most exquisite music at his touch—yes, those nerves would shrink and shudder at any contact not the right one. And, of course, there never had been, never could be, a "right one" save only his. Said he:

"You beautiful darling."

"Oh, no," corrected she, "I'm not beautiful. Perhaps a little different looking—thin—and with a big mouth——"

He shivered with rapture as she thus adroitly reminded him of that rare bundle of nerves, her body, and of those ecstasy-charged lips. "You are like something out of a Swinburne or Rossetti poem," cried he.

Quite a flight into the empyrean of culture for the young stove manufacturer. It giddied her, made her laugh with happiness. She had tried hard to be exactly that Swinburne-Rossetti girl. She had succeeded!

"What a wonderful man you are," said she with that depth of conviction we sound only for those who have told us the thing about ourselves we most wish to hear. "How much you know, and how well you say it."

He lingered until all hours, departed in a fever, and leaving her in a fever. They were to see each other the following afternoon when he should leave the office a little early for the trip to the bank.

Many and varied are the trifling harmless deceptions practiced by us human beings in our effort to live up to our ideals. Each of us feels that he is not really deceiving, but is merely anticipating an excellence that will surely be ours soon. It is foolish and unjust to condemn—in others—these deceptions, to blow them up into vast moral turpitudes. It is no evidence of Enid Holmes's wickedness that, in striving to present her pose to young Prescott in perfection, she committed a slight breach of strict veracity. In Lester, among the young people, in moments of enthusiasm natural to lively youth, it was almost the matter of course that there should be a little hand-holding, a little "spooning" even. But such doings did not fit in with a pose of mystery, aloofness and extreme delicateness of nervous sensibility. Thus it was not only natural, it was necessary that Enid should "forget" certain concessions to the unavowed code of Lester youth. Those concessions had in fact been rare and mild. Enid was too electric—felt too keenly, caused men to feel too keenly—to dare to adventure

far or frequently. It seemed to her that in comparison with the avowed record of so many of the girls her own record was indeed the blank she had described to credulous Walter Prescott.

And when she suffered Walter to put his arm round her and to kiss her, it had meant a great deal to her—had meant what no other man's touch or kiss had ever meant. This, not so much because it was different in itself as because she wished it to be different. With other men she had been practicing, amusing herself, preventing an evening's call from being a dismal stretch of silences interrupted by common-place talk, or giving the convincing touch of make-believe romance to a moonlight stroll between dances. With Walter she was in earnest, and she wished him to be in earnest.

But—was he? Again and again the young men and the young women indulged in a little "nestling," as it was called, with no notion of seriousness on either side. True, in the novels no nice girl "nestled" ever so little except seriously, and no man ever tried to induce a nice

girl to "nestle" unless he was in deadly, license-and-ring earnest—or was a black-hearted as well as black-mustached scoundrel. But then the novels contained no real people, and the novelists knew nothing about life as it was lived—at least in Lester, Pa. So—was he in earnest, or was he merely trying to be agreeable as a caller?

No wonder Enid Holmes went up to bed in a fever higher than the one Walter Prescott walked off before he returned home. She made some excellent resolutions. They bore fruit within a week. When in the daily and even twice daily meetings he tried to touch her, she drew away. Drawing away fitted in beautifully with her pose. And she could scare herself with thought that drove the color from her cheeks and made them harmonize with her wide, startled eyes. If he was misled into fancying these interesting effects were due wholly to the power of his touch, to the astonishing and intoxicating sympathy between this girl's wondrous soul and his—if he was thus misled, was it her fault? Was it—honestly—evidence of deep-dyed duplicity in her charac-

ter? Let him or her that is without sin cast the first stone.

A week of this starvation, of this evidence of her delicacy and delirious infatuation with him, and Walter "talked ring." From the first time he called alone, he had intended to "talk ring." Had she been less abstinent—and not too free—he would as surely have "talked ring." Possibly he might have talked it somewhat sooner. But she believed that her restraint was the cause—and she kept on at the lucky policy after they were formally engaged. Also, her delicacy had now become real—or, she believed it had, and that comes to the same thing. A pose, if it is a genuine outgrowth of a personality, soon ceases to be pretense, ceases to be a detached thing, and grows to one like a true skin. Enid's pose was of that kind. It was growing to her, as were all the graftings into it she made from time to time as she understood it better and better.

Walter announced his engagement to his father and mother, together at the breakfast table the morning after it was accomplished. Said he,

looking at his father, then at his mother, then straight ahead at the mahogany sideboard laden with cut glass and showy china:

"Enid Holmes and I—we've become engaged."

A solemn pause.

He looked at his mother, and said: "I know you'll like her, mamma." He looked at his father, and said: "I know you'll be pleased, as you're always urging me to marry."

His father—stocky, bewhiskered, practical and prosperous—stretched out his hand. "Nice girl," said he. "Looks like a *woman*. I mean, she isn't big and loud, like so many nowadays. You're doing well, young man. You can't settle too soon to suit me."

Walter shook hands with his father, then waited expectantly upon his mother. She was a robust, rather elderly woman, with a sensible, pleasant face. She had all the education necessary for her part in life as she conceived it. She and her husband got on placidly, like two friends who were used to each other, who did not know each other very well, but as well as they cared to

know each other. She was in no hurry to speak. She poured herself a second cup of coffee from the old-fashioned urn before her, put cream and sugar in it, stirred it, tasted it.

"Well, mamma?" said Walter.

"I think you're too young to marry," said she.

"Nonsense, ma," said the elder Prescott brusquely. "Haven't I told you Walter would be better off married?"

"Yes," replied she, after another deliberate sip of coffee. "But I think he's too young to commit himself." She had a placid way of standing by her opinions, without giving any reason, that was highly exasperating to her impetuous husband and son.

"You don't understand men," retorted her husband. He knew considerably more than did "ma" about their Walt's occasional "outbreaks"; and he had the elderly fear of their menace to health and orderly business habits. And to morals—of course, morals; that should never be overlooked. "If you understood men, you wouldn't talk that way."

"I don't believe in short engagements or early marriages," said Mrs. Prescott. "Anyhow, Walt, you're not going to marry *soon?*"

"As soon as she'll do it," replied Walt.

"Then that means mighty quick," said his mother. Not by way of flinging at Enid; simply a philosophic conclusion, drawn from her experience of life—and of women.

"You like her—don't you, mamma?" urged Walter.

"So far as I've seen," replied Mrs. Prescott.

"I wouldn't want to marry a woman you weren't fond of."

"Your ma don't think any woman's good enough for *her* son," said Pa Prescott, with humorous intent.

"Oh, you can't tell anything much about girls," said Mrs. Prescott. "I reckon Walt stands about as good chance with one as with another. You never can tell what a woman is until she's married, no more'n you can tell what kind of a kernel there is in the nut before the shell's broken."

"My notion is," observed Pa Prescott, "that

most any *good* girl'll do. The thing is to get the man settled and steadied with some responsibility."

He had finished his breakfast. Instead of urging Walter to hurry and go to the office with him, he went alone. The occasion was extraordinary; the boy would want to talk things over with his mother. As soon as he was gone, the son—in a tone of ease, intimacy, and affection he never took when his father was about—said:

"You're not going to be against me in this, are you—ma?"

"Lord, no," replied his mother. "I reckon the girl's all right. She don't amount to much, to look at—nothing but skin and bone, and a lot of wavy hair. But I suppose she'll fatten out. I was almost as little as her when your pa married me."

Walter did not show any signs of ecstatic enthusiasm at the prospect of a fattened wife. The cold douche of his mother's obvious common sense daunted and depressed him.

"Though," his mother went on, "I don't

reckon she'll ever be quite as big as her mother. *She* sits all day, poring over those novels. If *I* sat like that, I'd be so big I couldn't get up."

"*Why* don't you like her, mother?" demanded Walter, irritated. "Do speak straight out."

"I've got nothing against her," protested his mother. "You can't expect everybody to think her as wonderful as you do—*now*. All I'm saying is, don't do things in a hurry."

"But you said yourself that there was no telling about a girl until she was married. You wouldn't have me let somebody else marry her and wait till she was a widow?"

"There's a lot to be said for widows," rejoined Mrs. Prescott. "A man that marries a widow knows what he's getting. When a man marries a girl, the only thing he can be sure of is that he ain't getting what he thinks he is."

They were both in a good humor now. Walter put his arm round her and kissed her. Said he:

"Do go to see her, mommy, and be nice to her."

"Of course I will," said his mother. "I'll like her well enough." She laughed shrewdly. "*She'll* see to that."

And Enid did. She did no posing with the old lady she wished to win—"dear Walter's darling of a mother," as she called her to herself—quite sincerely. She was simple and sweet and frankly anxious to please—was not at all "weird and mysterious," no more so than one of Maeterlinck's or Swinburne's ladies would be in the uses of everyday life, with no credulous males to mystify and entrap. She let Mrs. Prescott discover —quite by chance—that the Holmes's housekeeping was done by her, and was done well. The only positive defect Mrs. Prescott was able to discover was that Enid had the mania for having her photograph made, in all sorts of queer, pensive, soulful, face-feeling, eye-twisting poses. Very lovely photographs—not too conspicuously displayed. But Mrs. Prescott strongly disliked this form of vanity, chiefly because it was so wastefully expensive. Still, all the girls were mad about having their pictures taken. Enid

was merely falling in with the general fad. Mrs. Prescott felt that it would be harsh to condemn her utterly. But misgivings she could not help having.

Samuel Prescott was all for putting his son's marriage through. "Have the wedding next month," said he. "I'll not take your mother and go abroad until after you come back from your wedding trip."

And Prescott had his way, it being everybody's way except Mrs. Prescott's—and she did not venture to oppose her husband strongly. It was settled that the wedding should be in early March, with a brief trip South or to Bermuda.

Immediately it was all arranged, Enid became radiant, confident, more mysteriously fascinating and elusive than ever. And Walter—— He was fascinated, infatuated, eager. And yet—— He was signed, sealed and delivered over—was as good as married—was assailed by an army of doubts and fears. When he was with the girl of his choice, the girl whose spirituality was so mysterious and awe-inspiring, the girl who sur-

charged him with such giddying emotions—when he was with her, he had no fears and no doubts, only eagerness. But no sooner was he alone than he began to chill and to shrink. The sensible-sounding things his mother had said, the sensible things he himself had said and thought, "before I went crazy over her," the awful warnings about unhappy marriage and divorce he was hearing and reading—all these urged on their terrors to attack him.

"What do she and I know about each other?" the sensible young stove manufacturer asked himself. "What sort of *wife* will she make? What sort of wife do I want? Do I really want any wife at all? What's the matter with me, anyhow, getting cold feet when it's too late to sidestep?—and, damn it, do I want to sidestep? I don't want to be married, but I do want her. What's a fellow to do?"

What, indeed? Obviously nothing but go on. It was no indication of unusual sensitiveness in Enid Holmes that she felt his nervousness. "Engaged man's panic" is as familiar a phe-

nomenon as the squawking of a captured chicken or the flopping of a hooked fish. And woman instinctively anticipates it, feels it before it actually begins, deals with it according to her abilities. No woman ever feels that this is a slur upon her; she knows that it does not involve her, but is only the nervousness of the free at the touch of the matrimonial bridle—and that bridle, as she knows and as he knows, is not in her hands, but in the hands of society. Even the man marrying for a home, even the man marrying for children or for money, even the man marrying because only by marriage can he hope to get some one to associate with him, bear with him, listen to him, on terms of his own arranging—even these men feel the nervousness as the bridle drops over their heads and the bit presses their quivering lips. She sympathized with him presently. For his nervousness affected her, made her feel the longing to be free. If she had ever had freedom, such as he had, would not she have hated to give it up? . . . "Would I have given it up?" As she grew more nervous about

him, about the whole business, her secret heart answered that question with an emphatic no. And she began to feel—not exactly contempt for him, but a certain vague kind of superiority to him who was doing this weak thing. She loved him—yes. She looked up to him—yes. How can one love and look up, and at the same time dislike and look down? Nobody knows; all we know is that human nature which is capable of all inconsistencies is capable of this. And she was just a little afraid that he, who had got her into the habit of loving him and counting on him, would fail her—

In one of their spasms of reaction from these moods of panic, she said, with absolute sincerity:

"What an ideal love ours has been! How perfectly we sympathize—and understand—and trust!"

"Perfectly!" echoed he, as serious as she. "I feel as if we had known and loved always. I wish to God, Enid, it was all over and our happiness was secure. Let's get married at once. This suspense is upsetting me horribly."

"Me, too," said she. His suggestion tempted her for a moment. But only for a moment. And soon he, too, saw how absurd and unconventional and scandal-making such a freak would be.

"Thank Heaven, it's only two weeks away," cried he.

"They'll soon pass," said she, hopefully.

But such days do not pass soon. A dozen times in those two weeks of strain they almost quarreled. Once they broke the engagement, and while it was he who humbled himself and made it up, he rather felt that he was doing it out of consideration for her—that, left to choose freely for himself, he would—no, not exactly drop the whole business, but put it off, away off.

"If divorce wasn't possible, would a sane man ever marry?" he said to himself. Then, "Good Lord, what a thought for a man madly in love and about to be married!"

As for her—— Her mother said to her one day:

"How lovely your happiness has made you! How happy you are!"

"Yes—I suppose I'm happy," replied Enid. "But—— Mama, if women didn't simply have to marry, wouldn't they act very differently? . . . Is that a dreadful thought?"

"*You* don't *have* to marry, darling," said her mother.

"I'm not exactly what you'd call crazy about being an old maid," replied the girl.

"Don't you love Walter?"

"Indeed I do!" cried she. "But——"

"But—what?"

"I don't know," replied she vaguely.

"I should think you didn't!" exclaimed her mother.

II

MARRIAGE

ENID HOLMES was within a few months of twenty when she married Walter Prescott, son of the rich stove manufacturer—rich for Lester, Pa., where a very modest sum indeed is an ample competence. Two years of married life passed without event of apparent importance. Then, within three winter months, one misfortune crashed in upon another until she felt that her life was in ruins.

First, her mother died. A supportable calamity in itself, as Mrs. Holmes had only a perfunctory affection to spare from herself even for her only child. It is a wise provision of nature to mitigate grief and to save the world from being a house of inconsolable grief, that all human beings grow rapidly more selfish—unashamedly and aggressively selfish—as they grow older,

and, so, as rapidly decrease in charm. Enid's mourning was made acute by the discovery that her mother, instead of leaving her the small but secure independence of sixteen hundred a year she had always counted upon, had wasted the principal in foolish speculation and had left only five or six hundred dollars over and above the amount necessary to give her the kind of funeral Lester demanded of people of station.

Next, she discovered that she no longer loved her husband. In fact, after searching examination of her heart, she rather thought that she never had loved him, that she had probably married for the same reasons as those moving most of the Lester girls into matrimony—because a man who was a good catch had asked her; because his ardent courting had flattered her; because she was at the age when wily nature fills young minds with gorgeous and tantalizing imaginings; because she did not wish to be an old maid or to have to take some poor scrub of a left-over. The girls of Lester were born into an evil day. The golden age—when the men out-

numbered the women and woman was at a premium, was an object of adoration and could choose among several—the golden age had passed. There were more girls than marriageable men, the men were cocky and critical, talked about getting their money's worth, compared the charms of different girls on a basis of lasting quality, showed scant reverence for womanhood in the old, beautiful, sentimental sense. Evil days, indeed. So, Enid had made haste to fancy herself in love—for, of course, she, a pure, high-minded woman could not marry unless she was in love. She now realized that she had deluded herself. Was there any such thing as love? Yes, there must be. But it was not any feeling she ever had had or ever could have for so ordinary a person as Walter Prescott.

Finally, a third and crowning calamity.

As soon as she discovered that she did not love her husband, she was seized of a series of spasms of cruel moral struggle. What was it her duty to do? Should she tell him and leave him? And if she left, where go, when she had

no money and no relatives able to give her any of the comforts a refined and delicate nature such as hers must have? Should she tell him, and stay on, "a wife in name only"? Would he let her stay on? Would it not be kinder to him to hide her horrid secret deep in her bosom and as well as she could—no doubt well enough to deceive as coarse a nature as his—simulate a love she did not feel?

It was a dreadful, delightful experience. She felt herself a true heroine of romance at last. The experience would have been altogether delightful and dreadful only in a nice, comfortable theatrical way, but for the fact that she longed to love. She looked at herself in the glass—young, with a delicate, slender, eager face, with a narrow, slender, nervous body that was, like her face, an expression of a restless, perfervid nature. She looked at her large eyes, gazing so mysteriously from under that careless fascinating disarray of bronze-colored hair, looked at her sensitive little nose, at her wide, passionate mouth. She looked at these charms that seemed

to sum up into a personality of mystery and fire. And she pitied herself. Only twenty-two, and all this bewitching allure wasted upon one with the soul of a stove-maker. Only twenty-two, and the long, long years stretching away emptily. She saw her delicious charms fading as the years passed, saw her exquisite soul withering and paling like a flower unvisited of rain and sun. And she wept.

She spent a great deal of time in these tears of self-pity that so freely flow from feminine eyes in these evil days of womanhood unappreciated, of womanly culture scoffed at, of womanly delicacy derided as mere laziness and selfishness. She simply could not make up her mind to obey the mandate of her higher nature and tell him. It would be such a cruelty to him, who loved her after his fashion, and, in his dull stupidity of the absorbed commercial person, had not a suspicion of what her finer nature was feeling. Also, she had no money, and he was anything but generous about money; suppose he should let her go? Go!—where? No, she must be kind to him,

must spare him, must let him wallow on in his coarse content; she must hide her sorrow.

But this noble — and prudent — resolution yielded to a fit of temper.

For perhaps the hundredth time she was trying to induce him to buy an automobile. This refusal to keep anything to drive in was one of the scores of indignities he had put upon her, in being a miser and making her a miser's wife. It was too ridiculous, when his father was so well off and there were only the two children, Walter and Molly, and when Walter had a partnership in the factory and got in dividends and salary about twelve thousand a year. And they living quietly in a cottage, hardly better than the one she and her mother had lived in on sixteen hundred a year. And no clothes to speak of, no entertaining, nothing to drive in. How the pitying remarks of her friends galled her!

She felt that they simply must have the automobile. She asked him for it directly, indirectly. She tried wheedling; she tried anger; she tried

shamming. Just now she was trying shamming—with not the least success.

Said Walter:

"What do we care? Everybody despises those people who are skimping at home and mortgaging and dodging their debts to have an auto. But even if they were respected, and we were despised, still what of it? Just be patient, Enid, and in a few years we can have everything we want—securely, for the rest of our lives."

"But I want to enjoy while I'm young, Walt," pleaded she. "Why should we lead this miserable, shriveling little life?"

"We're living as well as either of us lived before we were married," retorted he.

Her eyes flashed and her bosom heaved. "When a *man* loves a woman, he wants to give her everything that is fine and beautiful. He tries to surround her with all that a woman needs in order to appear at her best. He doesn't stint and slight her."

He would never quarrel with her—another

thing she had against him. He now rose to leave the room.

In her anger she forgot the lost sixteen hundred a year and the resolutions of generous and merciful secrecy. She cried out:

"No wonder I can't bear you. No wonder I shiver when you touch me. You killed my love. You are not capable of appreciating a woman, and you are not fit to be trusted with one."

He stopped short. There was a pause—awful for her. Then he turned round, came back to his chair and slowly seated himself. Said he:

"Is that so?—what you said?"

She was mortally afraid, she, who had nothing but what he saw fit to give her. She wished with all her heart that she had kept the secret. But she could not tell the lie.

"Haven't you done everything you could to kill my love?"

The business-like looking young man was eyeing her with disquietingly calm interest and discreetness. Said he:

"You mean by insisting on our living quietly

until I've paid off what I owe my father for the stock, and am independent?"

"Oh, you know you are mean about money," retorted she. "Why deny it? I'm still wearing clothes I got for my trousseau."

"So am I."

"But *I* don't want to do that sort of shabby thing."

He laughed unpleasantly. "When I was courting, you couldn't talk enough about our being alone, living quietly just for each other."

"But I didn't know how dull you were, Walter," said she with a bitter-sweet smile.

"I was just the same then as now," replied he. "Except that then I used to talk all the time about you. But that subject became exhausted. You can't hold me responsible if you no longer supplied me with things to say about you."

He looked at her with the exasperating expression of a man who has tried to score and feels that he has accomplished his object. She could not hide her wincing.

"You say you find me dull," pursued he, in the

placid way of the easy victor. "But hereafter please don't forget that I found you dull first."

"You're very much mistaken there," retorted she. "If I hadn't been ashamed, I'd never have married you. But I didn't realize. A girl is so ignorant. I had no idea what marriage meant."

He was irritated now. "You certainly concealed your feelings well, for all your innocent young girlishness. You talk about your refinement. Bosh! You women are much coarser than we men. You've just admitted a thing that proves it."

"You are insulting! What cowardice! You're a man that might strike a woman."

"I confess I've felt like spanking you, miss, many and many a time."

She gazed at him with wide, dry eyes. "And *this* is what our courtship has sunk to!" said she in a tone of awe and horror.

"No theatricals, please," said he drily. "If you had any real sensitiveness, you'd feel as I do about paying that debt to father and being independent. But your sensitiveness is all for silly

luxury and for cheap, high-sounding talk. Another thing, if you were the sensitive shrinking thing you pretend to be, the awfulness of living with a man you didn't love and the strain of playing the hypocrite as well as any professional fast lady would have killed you. Instead, you're in remarkably good health, tough as hickory. Oh, I guess I haven't hurt you much."

"You will never know how much, Walter. You don't understand women. They were born to suffer."

"Well—it seems to have been good for *your* health."

"How coarse you are!"

"Indeed I am. So coarse that I can still endure the sight of you after the degrading confession you've made." He relented. "I beg your pardon. You are goading me into saying things I'm ashamed of. But a woman must expect consequences when she tells a man he has been repulsive to her and that she's been hiding it."

"You wrung the truth from me," protested she.

"By refusing to buy you an auto?"

"Oh, you are so coarse! That had nothing to do with it."

"You'd love me, no doubt, if I were to give up trying to pay my debts and turn you loose with all the money we have. But I can live without that kind of love, my dear."

"Coarse—coarse," repeated she. "It's useless to talk to you."

"Then let's drop that," said he.

"But what am *I* to do?" demanded Enid. "You've made it impossible for me to love you. My life is utterly empty. I'll go mad, just sitting and thinking—thinking—thinking."

He sat smoking and reflecting.

"I don't want to be cruel to you," she went on. "I believe that you mean well. It isn't your fault that—that I can't love you—that we're unsuited to each other."

"What are you trying to get at?" inquired he. "How much alimony I'll allow you?"

She shivered. "Walter, do please try not to be so coarse!" cried she. "Try to spare my feelings a little."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Weren't you hinting at divorce?" he asked.

"I had nothing in mind," replied she. "Simply—I don't know what to do."

His manner showed plainly that he regarded this as mere evasion. In a tone of mockery he said:

"But you'd not mind being free with a nice fat allowance of alimony—would you?"

"I never thought of such a thing—*never!*"

"Bosh!" retorted he. "How could I live with you two years and a half without discovering that your talk about not being practical was largely bluff. You're shrewd, all right—shrewd enough to fool even yourself. So—don't deceive yourself and try to deceive me with this nonsense about not thinking divorce and alimony. In this day girls go to the altar with it in their heads, I've read, and all women think about such things."

She—the slender and nervous—was storming about the room, all aquiver with fury. "Oh, if mama had left me that money, I'd show you!"

"But she didn't," rejoined he. "So—what are you going to do?"

She stormed about, he waited. At last she seated herself again. "What an unfeeling wretch you are!" cried she. "How can you talk in this way, when you love me?"

"Who said I loved you?" replied he.

She looked at him, startled.

He returned her look, but his was as calm as a stove-maker in the tranquility of the office routine. Said he:

"If you'll think hard, you'll recall that I haven't spoken the word love since the first or second month of our marriage."

A long silence. She stood his frank, calm gaze as long as she could, then dropped her eyes. When power of speech came to her she said in a low, dazed voice:

"Do you mean to say *you* don't love *me?*"

"Like you, I never did," was his reply. "I was crazy about you when I proposed. I was alternately crazy and uncertain until we married. Then for a while I was altogether crazy. But I

got tired just as you did. You bored me just as I bored you. I found you didn't appreciate the things I think worth while, just as you found I didn't appreciate your pet things."

"Why didn't you show it?"

"I was fooled by your bluff at loving me."

A sense of deep, of sickening mortification was oozing through her. "You are saying these things to get even with me."

He laughed pleasantly. "I'm saying them because it's a relief not to have to pretend any longer. You don't seem to be as delighted as you, with your sensitive, delicate soul, should be, learning that you're not making me suffer by telling me you don't love me. In fact, you look distinctly disappointed—and angry."

"I care nothing about what you think," cried she. "All I know is, I wish I had never seen you."

"I guess that's a state a good many married couples drop into when they've got enough of each other."

"How cowardly of you to insult me, when you

know I'm helpless—know I'm dependent on you."

"I didn't ask you to be," he reminded her.

He was about to repair his slip of saying "ask" when he meant "compel." But she did not give him the chance. She rushed ahead triumphantly:

"Yes, you did! You asked me to marry you. And when a man asks a woman to marry her, he means that he will treat her well—that he'll support her according to her station. And you've broken your promises. Oh, I know why now. It's because you didn't love me."

She had outgeneralled him, and his agitation confessed it.

"All you felt for me," she went on, "was a something too vile to name——"

"Oh, no, Enid," remonstrated he. "It's not so bad as all that."

"It seems vile to *me,*" retorted she. "And because that was the way you felt, you wouldn't treat me honorably, as you'd have treated a woman you loved. No wonder you've been so mean and stingy with me."

He was too honest to deny. He nodded thoughtfully. "I guess if I had loved you, you'd have been able to make a fool of me—and of yourself. It's lucky I didn't."

"Lucky!" cried she, in a panic at this unexpected, dangerous turning of her plank. "Why, if you had treated me lovingly, I'd have loved you."

He stretched himself comfortably. "I'm afraid you attach more value to that love of yours than it's really entitled to, Enid. You women can give yourselves a pretty good quality of love. But the sort you have for men isn't worth much. I personally don't want it at all. No, my dear, a man who falls in love with a woman is in mighty bad luck. He's ready to be made a fool of. And a man whom a woman loves—poor devil! she'll soon bleed him of his health and his money. Then—she's a widow and ready to love somebody else."

She gazed at him in unaffected horror. Worse than his boring silences, worse than his dull talk about business and politics and such stupidities

was this amazing, revolting cynicism. The man was even lower and coarser than she had thought. She said:

"You hate me, don't you?"

"No, indeed," replied he. "I think you're a very nice, shallow little girl—to be quite honest. I think you're well up to the average. You're not as good looking as I thought you were, when I was crazy about you. But your looks are all right. You're a good deal of a faker—fond of posing—but that's not serious. And I guess all of us humans have a touch of it. Yes—you are all right. I don't lay it up against you that I made a fool of myself about you."

"Yes, you hate me," said she firmly. "You couldn't talk to me this way, if you didn't."

"No—it's simply that you're not interesting to me, any more than I am to you. You mustn't think I hate you, just because you hate me. You've got reason for hating me. One always hates a person one tries to get things out of and fails. You wanted my flattery and my money. You can't get either. So—you find me coarse

and repulsive. If I'd given you both as freely as you wanted them, you'd have thought me a poor damn fool and would have despised me."

She stared wretchedly into vacancy. She had thought she had reached the farthest bourne of tragic experience when she discovered that she did not love him, her husband. Now that tragedy seemed a mere make-believe beside this reality of danger—this indifference of her husband to her. "What *shall* I do!" she said, dismally. "What *is* to become of me?"

"Oh, you'll get along all right," he assured her in an encouraging tone. "You'll soon catch another, when you're free. They say it's much easier for a woman to marry the second time." He laughed good-humoredly. "Though I must say I think you'd have trouble finding easier fruit than I was."

She was so agitated that she heard no more after the word "free." She started up, crying:

"Do you mean that you would cast me off with never a thought? Oh, you couldn't be as brutal as that!"

"That's what you want, isn't it?—a divorce?"

In all her reading, in all the stories she had heard of the relations of men and women, she had come upon nothing in any way resembling this ghastly reality. In those romances, the woman had always figured as the central and superior figure. And if they told of women wronged, it was man the brute who was doing it —and he was soon brought to her feet or to terrible judgment. Nothing was hinted of this sordid, savage truth—the impossibility of woman's cutting any but a sorry figure in a set-to with a man, because she had to ask him for money, had to submit to whatever degradation in order to get it. Money! "If I only had that sixteen hundred a year!" she said to herself. But—she hadn't. And sixteen hundred a year seemed a pitifully small sum, now that she was in the habit of dreaming the dreams of the wife of a rich man.

"Don't you want a divorce?" he repeated.

"Do you?" she replied, to gain time.

"I most certainly do," was his prompt answer.

"I can think of no reason for detaining you. I'll divide my salary of fifty dollars a week with you —gladly."

Twenty-five dollars a week! She was shaking with fury she dared not show lest he should jeer at her as caught red-handed in sordidness. Oh, what a wretched position she was in!—and that, when she was right—entirely right, and he ought to be on his knees offering her whatever she wished to take.

She said in a low, choked voice:

"All this means nothing to you. And I can't hope to make you realize how I feel—a woman —who gave herself up to you in her purity and innocence and trust. You can talk lightly of divorce——"

"Now, see here, Enid," cried he impatiently; "stop that faking. I've had all the nonsense about woman knocked out of me by living with one for two years. A woman's no different from a man—except that her game calls for a different bluff and a different front. You're half woman and half man—you had a father as well as a

mother. And I'm half man and half woman—for I had a mother, I guess. You've got plenty of sense. Use it. Stop faking!"

"Walter—*please!*" she pleaded, with sweet and gentle dignity.

"I'm a plain business man, you're a plain business man's wife. Let's go at this thing like the plain business proposition that it is. You'd better talk business with me direct. You'll get more satisfactory terms than you would through any lawyer you sent to me."

"*Can't* you understand the least little bit?" cried she. "You are torturing me! You have *no* refinement—no sentiment!"

"Where's the hysterics in two people who've made a bad bargain trying to call it off? You really don't deserve me. You ought to be dealing with a faker like yourself who was pretending to tear his hair and be refined in order to shave you down on the alimony."

"You—posing as generous!" jeered she. "You who've offered to me hardly enough to keep body and soul together."

He laughed—and she was furious at having dropped neatly into the trap he had set for her. She assumed an air of haughty disdain. She said:

"I don't know anything about these things. But I'm sure I have some rights you can be made to respect."

"Don't fool yourself, Enid," said he. "The law doesn't take any more interest in faking than I do. It looks at these matters practically. It says, 'If the woman wants to be supported, she's got to pay for it by taking care of her husband and by living with him!' "

"You threaten me with—that?" she exclaimed, struggling desperately for advantage. "You'd force me to live with you?"

"Now, do stop faking, my dear girl," said he. "Haven't I told you I'm as anxious for you to go as you are to be gone? I'm simply pointing out to you that the law would laugh at your wounded sensibilities—when you came asking it to get you a large sum of my money on the strength of them. You can be as sensitive as you

like. But when you try to use marriage as a means of getting a fat living without giving anything in return, the law refuses to look on you as sensitive. Come now—honestly—isn't the law right?"

She made a gesture of despair. "You *never* could understand!"

"Then don't try to make me understand. Take the twenty-five a week and leave me to wallow alone."

"I couldn't *touch* your money!" cried she.

"You've got to live until you marry again," rejoined he. "So, your remark translated from fake into plain English, can only mean that you'll try to get better terms through a lawyer. Well—have your way. You'll find I'm right—that you can't get a red out of me unless I'm willing."

There he abruptly left her—not in anger, but simply because a glimpse of his watch warned him that he was overdue at his work. Another of her deep grievances against him—another of those covers and justifications of the unconfessed real grievance—was that he always subordinated

her to his work, his "coarse craze for money." Presently she gathered herself together and went forth. She had often felt the need to confide; now she felt the necessity to confide. Among people at all prudent—in towns like Lester—the longing to confide dares seek no outlets but the doctor and the lawyer. Enid's doctor was a youngish man whose way of looking at her was a discreet but, to a woman of keen instinct, unmistakable suggestion of a waiting and willing attitude. There remained only the lawyer—her mother's lawyer and friend, Judge Bowers; he, by the way, had *not* advised her mother to or in those stealthy and ruinous speculations.

As she walked along, she thought about that talk with Walter. While they were talking she had been wholly absorbed in what he was saying, in keeping in place, or trying to keep in place the cover over her secret self which he was tugging away at—not without success. It is indeed an engrossing occupation to try to prevent one's inmost self from being revealed to another's eyes —and, worse still, to one's own eyes. But now

she began to recall how different he had been from the taciturn, dull Walter she had been yawning at for two years. How he had waked up! A very ugly Walter was this awakened one —but still not the sodden clod she had thought him. Different, entirely different though this insulting, cynical, hard Walter was from the ardent and attractive Walter of their days of courtship, there was yet a strong resemblance between them. Both were alive, full of fire, able to stir emotion, strong emotion, in her.

She stopped short in the street and stared unseeingly into the very face of a passing laborer, much to his astonishment. She said to herself, "He was telling the truth! He doesn't care for me—and hasn't! That was why he was so dull. He found out he didn't care for me before I found out I didn't care for him. . . . Was *that* why I lost interest in him?"

Those humiliating thoughts made her blood burn her skin. No! No!—she had stopped caring for him—*if* she ever had cared—because he was unworthy of her, he, the mere dollar-

chaser. And the reason he had stopped caring for her was because she was so far his superior.

She walked on, comforted—to a certain extent.

Judge Bowers—old and white, and suave in a fatherly yet friendly way—had spent a large part of the days of the years of a long life at the study and practice of the art of putting people at their ease for difficult confidences. Enid was soon in full gallop of confession. She exhibited her wounded sensibilities, her bruised heart, her soul, high, sorrowful. She said no more about alimonious divorce than she had said to Walter before he himself introduced that coarse and sordid theme. That is, she said nothing at all—hinted nothing whether openly or covertly. Yet—strangely—when she finished, or, rather paused for some comment from the sympathetic old lawyer, his first remark was:

"Very sad—very sad, Enid. But—my dear child—unfortunately—I see no ground for divorce—especially with alimony."

Into the slender, wistful young face flashed and flushed a furious anger. "How *can* you think

me so coarse, Mr. Bowers!" cried she. "*I* didn't say—or mean—anything like that."

"Then—what did you mean?" rejoined he, gently.

What *did* she mean? A human being—a rational human being did not talk on and on and on, without meaning something. "I—I—wanted your advice," said she feebly.

"Oh!" said the aged lawyer—and it infuriated her afresh to see in his gentle, sympathetic face that he was incredulous. What coarse brutes men were! No—not all men. Surely somewhere there must be men capable of at least understanding a highly, delicately organized feminine being like—like some women.

"You are a rare spirit, Enid," he went on. "You always were strange." He meant strange or mysterious to look at. But he either did not know or did not care just then to discuss how an unusual exterior did not necessarily mean an unusual interior—or how a woman, with unimportant, though to men transiently interesting, surface oddities might get from her mirror as

false a notion of her own nature as men get of it from the same untrustworthy reporter. "You always were strange," said he. "Different looking from any of the girls. But—you've got to live life just like the rest of us, my child. We all have to adjust ourselves to conditions."

"I can't!" murmured Enid. "I can't!"

The Judge smiled to himself. These women! Their absurd little vanity—their excitement about themselves, fostered from childhood by instilling in them the idea that each of them possessed a priceless physical treasure which the whole world of males was plotting day and night to wrest from them. Aloud he said:

"Men are never worthy of you women. Men are of a coarser fibre. But they have their good points, Enid. They have their uses. The way to get on with a man is to ignore his bad points and to fix your mind resolutely on his good ones. Don't you think, my dear, that you'd get on more happily if you—*brooded* less—if you thought less about yourself—and made yourself think about other things?"

To discharge his duty as a lawyer and as an old person counseling a young person he had to make his words distinct of meaning. But as he spoke he soothed her vanity and kept it quiet with the skillful softness of his tone and manner.

"I do brood an awful lot," she confessed. "But how can I help it. As you say, I have a strange, sensitive nature."

"Yes—yes, but you must try to forget that. Try to interest yourself in your life. I assure you, my dear, no matter where you live or with whom, you will find living a practical business. It can't have the hazy, unreal atmosphere of the novels and the poems. Force yourself to be interested, and soon you will be interested without forcing. There's nothing in brooding or cloud and rainbow-chasing—nothing but disappointment and unhappiness. Poets get up that sort of stuff—not to live, but to *sell,* my dear. And they eat and drink the proceeds."

"I can't live a crude, unimaginative life," declared she.

"Try it—try it," urged he. "In fact, you've got to. You can't live on air."

She debated telling him Walter's offer of a divorce with the stingy twenty-five a week. But she decided that it would be most indelicate in a wife to violate the sacredness of a private talk between her husband and herself. Also, Judge Bowers might misunderstand, might misjudge her, if he learned that the subject of alimony had actually come up between her and Walter. Also, what an abasement to confess that a man, after having lived with her and having had every opportunity to discover the wonders of her nature, the joys of her intimacy, had offered her freedom—and a paltry twenty-five a week. No, the sacredness of marital confidences must not be violated.

Her wistful face lent itself to an expression of despair-beyond-utterance that most of those who suffer from the cruel, real tragedies of life could never have attained. As the old Judge looked at her, he was profoundly moved—not, as he fancied, by her despair, but by her *look* of

despair. The actors—on and off the stage, conscious and self-deceiving—get almost all the sympathy in this world; there is little left for the wretched ones who are suffering so that they neglect to make their agonies look interesting.

"I don't know *what* to do!" she said, rising and standing before him—that strong, slim young figure irradiating allure from its restless nerves; that intense, passionate, passion-stirring little face beneath the swirl of thick bronze-colored hair. She stirred the languid currents of the old man. She sighed deeply, said: "I guess there's no hope."

"Your husband loves you——"

Enid flushed guiltily.

"——is proud of you—will do anything you wish for you—except, of course, give you up. For your own sake, try to make him happy."

Enid frowned impatiently. The old dotard was talking like a copy book. What a fool she was to come to such a one—she with the fire and passion of youth in her veins, with the mad thirst for life at its alivest. She thanked him, broke

through his efforts to induce her to linger, returned home. And there, alone, she was free to give herself up to the luxury of examining her known wounds and seeking those previously overlooked. Of all the mischief the devil finds for idle hands, the most mischievous—and the most indulged—is feeling one's own sore spots, and pressing resolutely for latent sore spots until there is response. Enid, with nothing else to do, passed a busy day.

At half past six she heard Walter splashing about in the bathroom. At seven they met for dinner. He was, as usual—silent, listless, bored. Yes, bored; she understood his manner now. He bored her to irritation; she bored him to indifference. She had a series of hot flushes as she compared the two ways of boring; for again it seemed he had the advantage over her. It was maddening, to be the superior person, yet to seem to be the inferior. After dinner he followed her to the sitting room to smoke. The routine of their monotonous life! And after the cigar, as he was an earlier riser by two hours

than she, he would go to bed, leaving her to read or to think about herself and him, about him—and herself.

She was playing the piano softly to herself. He said:

"May I interrupt that—whatever it is you're playing?"

"I'll stop if it annoys you," said she coldly.

"Oh, no, it doesn't annoy me. I don't notice it at all. Perhaps it even helps me to think. Yes, I'm sure it does. But—— I'm going to bed as soon as I finish this cigar. To-morrow's pay roll day. I wanted to say one or two things to you."

The wistful, passionate little face, the wide, sensitive mouth grew tense—even hard.

"I've got to withdraw that offer I made you after lunch to-day."

"Oh, yes—that *generous* offer."

He frowned slightly. He started to make an angry retort, controlled himself. He said:

"I had a talk with father. He told me point blank that I'd have to get out of the firm if I didn't drop the divorce business. He said that

every married couple went through exactly the same experience you and I are having, and that only the damn fools made a scandal. He said he wouldn't tolerate divorce unless you cut up with another man or ran away—without any money from me. He was heading off collusion."

Walter paused to give her a chance to speak. She did not take it.

"As it'd be very much to my disadvantage to break with him," Walter went on, "just at this stage of the game, why, I'll not consent to a divorce. And as I told you, you can't get one without my consent."

As there was no danger of her "bluff" being "called," if "bluff" it was, she ventured a bitter, contemptuous little laugh.

"But you won't have to wait long," he continued. "Inside of two years, at the present rate—maybe sooner—I'll own that stock and be in a position to make terms with father. I'm getting the business more and more in my hands. So, as soon as I can, I'll free you."

Anything so remote as two years away—two

years of this dragging dullness—made no impression on her. She waited.

"Meanwhile," proceeded he, "I think we can arrange to make each other fairly comfortable."

This sounded promising. "I'm willing to do anything I can," said she. "Do you wish me to go away?"

"We can't afford that," replied he. "Anyhow, I'd not consent to it. I've no fancy to join the society of fools who mail their money to women idling about and amusing themselves. In the second place, I want none of that kind of scandal-breeding nonsense. Finally—— I'm going to speak plainly."

"I don't need to be told that," said she sarcastically.

"Plain speaking—that's my way," replied he, unmoved. "I say right out what I've got to say. That's why I'm getting on well with the men. They hated it at first. Now they like it because they always know just where they stand."

"How like you, to put your wife on a level with your workmen!"

"I've only one way to treat everybody," rejoined he. "But, no matter about that. I want you to stay here—to stay 'on the job.' I think your self-respect would compel you to stay——"

"Don't deceive yourself."

"Then it ought to. You may not realize it, but you'd be degraded by taking money you didn't earn."

"Ah!" And she laughed in mocking scorn. "You want me to earn my board and clothes. I —your *wife!*"

"But you're not my wife—and don't want to be. And even if you were—I suppose it's part of my general lowness of character and lack of those precious fine sensibilities, but I can't see how it would degrade any one, even a wife, to earn their board and clothes. In business, trying to get something for nothing is called by a rather ugly name. How is it in those refined circles you aspire to?"

"Buying and selling! Oh, how *can* you think there's nothing in the world but buying and selling?"

"Oh, yes, there's a lot besides," answered he, and his look made her uncomfortable. "But board and clothes isn't one of those things. It's a thing to be earned. So—I expect you to do your share of the work. That means, stay here and run the house."

She was angry at herself for feeling enormously relieved.

"I'll make no complaints about the past," proceeded he.

She interrupted angrily, "What do you find fault with?"

He smiled amiably. "Now, Enid, you can't draw me up that alley for a fight. I'll simply say——" He tossed the end of the finished cigar out of the window and rose—"that in the future I'll expect as good service as I could get at a hotel for the same money."

She looked at him with cold fury. She could find no retort, though he was outraging every decency. She dared not remind him that she was his wife; for, had she not resigned from that position, and had not her resignation been accepted?

Anyhow, though she were still his wife, such a man would not regard that exalted word as meaning anything but a species of housekeeper and mender.

"If you do your part, I think we'll get on well enough. It'll be a great gain not to have to play the hypocrite toward each other—won't it?"

She was fighting with threatening hysterics.

"We've put our affairs on a sound, sensible basis——"

With a stifled scream she fled upstairs and locked herself in the little spare room.

An hour and a half later he knocked on the door and said:

"Please come out of my room. I want to go to bed."

"I'm going to keep this room," replied she, from the bed where she was lying.

"That won't do. It'd be uncomfortable for both of us, the way everything is arranged. Please don't keep me up. I've got a hard day tomorrow."

He was obviously right about their convenience. She effaced the traces of the storm as best she could and opened the door. He was sitting on the banister of the hall stairway, in pyjamas and bath robe. As she was passing him, he laid a detaining hand on her arm. She drew back, her red and swollen eyes flashing from her swollen and distinctly homely face.

"Let's shake hands on the new deal," said he affably. "Why take it hard, when each of us has got the principal part of what he wants? Be sensible, Enid. You know one can't have one's own way in this world. Everybody has to make the best of things."

She ignored his proffered hand.

"What is your quarrel with me?—besides being angry because I'm not bowed down by finding out that you don't love me?"

"I'm not angry," protested she, angrily.

"Then—shake hands on the new deal."

"No."

"You refuse to be friends? You insist on being enemies?"

"You have insulted me—again and again."

"I have told you the truth. That's a very unpleasant experience—in the beginning. But if you listen and use your good sense, you'll find it grows more and more pleasant. Whereas the other sort of thing—— Come, Enid, be a sport —shake hands."

Reluctantly she touched his hand and went on to her room—that had been their room. She was furious with herself in a disgustingly futile way—furious because she found she had cried out of herself the worst of her "mad." She told herself that the end of the world had come; yet there the world was—keeping right on. She said she would never be able to sleep. But her body, vulgarly material, refused to keep vigil with her anguished soul. It promptly went to sleep.

And what is a soul to do when a body refuses to back it up but insists on sleeping—and eating and the rest of the coarse routine of life?

Enid Prescott slept—slept soundly.

III

LOVE

MRS. WALTER PRESCOTT of Lester, Pa., was visiting her cousin, Mrs. Sam Croly, of Wilkesbarre. They had always been close friends; during this brief visit—less than two weeks—they had become so intimate that they were almost ready to discuss their husbands truthfully. They were at about the same age—twenty-five. They had been married about the same length of time—five years. Enid Prescott was darkish and slim—a narrow, nervous figure, a small, intense face, notably wide mouth, notably abundant bronze hair loosely and gracefully dressed. Jennie Croly was rather fair, voluptuous, "vivacious" rather than nervous—that is, having the placid temperament that sparkles or pretends to sparkle. Each thought the other charming in a "different" way.

And each was right, and there was no danger—with ordinary good luck—of either becoming estranged by jealous vanity. Each in her own town belonged to that small group of men and women who, in all our American cities and most of the towns nowadays, keep in the main current of fashions, manners and ideas flowing across the Atlantic from Paris and London and sending out branches in every direction from New York. Time was, not so many years ago, when the New Yorker, inspecting any other city or town, had ever at his supercilious lips the coarse but meaning word "jay." Not so to-day. Wherever he is in America he is reminded of "home"—that is of the small prosperous and comely part of the vast New York stretch of all kinds and conditions mostly poor to poverty-blasted. In New York Mrs. Prescott and Mrs. Croly would have been noted at once as "out-of-town" people—good looking, attractive, "up-to-date," but not native. In their native places they "looked New York."

These material and apparently surface facts about the two young women may perhaps give the

sagacious reader a better notion of how sympathetic they were to each other than would a more ambitious-sounding attempt to analyze their souls and catalogue their agreeing opinions on heaven, hell and novels and art.

Said Jennie to her visiting cousin:

"You mustn't go away Thursday, Enid."

"Thursday," replied young Mrs. Prescott.

"Sam's boss has asked us to go in his private car to New York. Two nights—a theater, an opera. Dinners and suppers at the Waldorf, the Ritz—teas at the Plaza."

Enid looked gloomy. But she repeated—drearily as well as firmly: "Thursday."

"Nonsense. Your husband wouldn't mind your staying."

"I suppose not. But—I must go."

"You haven't anything on earth to take you back to Lester."

Enid smiled bitterly. "Except my job."

Mrs. Croly's blue eyes looked puzzled.

"I'm not a married woman," explained Enid. "I'm a 'hired girl.' This visit—it's my vacation."

It was the first time in her grown-up years that Enid had given way to the longing to make indiscreet confidences. It was the first time she had said anything to anybody—except her husband—that would have disturbed the general opinion that her marriage was happy, or at least pleasantly successful. She was frightened by her confession as soon as the words were spoken. Also she was a little ashamed. Jennie Croly saw, and understood, and proceeded to take the one course that would save their friendship from ruin. She hastened to make an equally damaging, unwomanly, unwifely and altogether indiscreet confession about herself. If she had not, Enid would have begun to be suspicious, distrustful and would soon have been disliking her. Said she:

"Then you're not any happier than I am?"

Enid was genuinely astonished. "Why, you and Sam get on beautifully," she cried.

Jennie laughed. "If I'd been visiting you, wouldn't I have thought you and Walter Prescott were an ideal couple?"

"We've lived like strangers for two years now."

"I envy you," said Jennie in a dry, curt way.

There was a brief pause, during which each woman was thinking about herself. Jennie resumed:

"You'll never know what—what degradation is, until you're married to a man who looks on women as mere playthings. I don't know what your 'job' is. But it's not as repulsive as mine. Mine's keeping bathed and dressed and perfumed and pretty and sweet. I'm not allowed to do anything else—to think anything else. . . . I liked it at first—for a year or two. I thought it was love. I didn't understand. Perhaps I'd have liked it always if I'd remained as silly and empty-headed and ignorant as I was when he married me. But unfortunately I—grew up. If he found it out, he'd abandon me altogether. And—I'm dependent on him. I've got all sorts of tastes for comfort and luxury, and I couldn't make a living as a servant."

"I could at least do that—now," said Enid.

"I've learned enough in the last two years to qualify as a housekeeper. . . . Yes, I think I could earn my twenty-five a week, out at service. He gives me fifty a week to run the house and keep myself. So, I've calculated that my personal share is twenty-five a week." She laughed contemptuously. "Oh, I've got a generous husband. What he paid me was far too much for my services the first year. But I think I earn it now."

"You don't realize how well off you are," said Mrs. Croly. "You're at least allowed to do something—and to handle some money—and to have a few dollars you can call your own. . . . Do you suppose I don't know what it means when he comes home from a trip and brings me an unusually fine present? And *he* thinks he has both wiped out his sin and fooled me."

The expression of her cousin's face frightened Enid. "Oh, Jen!" she exclaimed. "Aren't you *too* bitter against him?"

"If I had any courage or self respect, I'd kill him or leave him. I have grown to *hate* him." Her face cleared, and she was smiling. "What

does my hate amount to? I'll stay on at my 'job' until—as long as I can't do any better—perhaps longer, for I'm a white rabbit when it comes to scandal of any kind—and I'm as afraid as death of Sam. He'd fling me into the gutter if I did—what he does every time he goes away."

Enid was not sure whether Jennie loved her husband and was wildly jealous or hated him as she alleged. Perhaps Jennie, in the very bottommost depth of her heart, was herself not sure which. At any rate Enid, being altogether human, was too full of her own affairs to have more than shallow and fleeting attention or sympathy for any one's else. She said:

"How dreadful! Jen, how different marriage is from what we dreamed as girls! I thought I loved Walter. But I, too, grew up. And when I discovered that I was married to a man who was simply——"

She cast about for a word that would sum up sordid plus practical plus unidealistic plus incapable of feeling either the milder or the finer emotions. Jennie suggested:

"Simply a stove manufacturer?"

"That's it," assented Enid. "He lives to make money by selling stoves. He has nothing to give a woman—no understanding of complex natures —of woman nature—the kind of women we are."

Jennie nodded sympathetically. "Oh, if I only had an income!" said she between her shut teeth. "But as it is I don't dare even go downtown without his consent. And I look so free! And everybody thinks I am—thinks he pampers and spoils me. Why, he won't allow me to have more than a few of my jewels at a time. He pretends it's safer to keep them in the big vault at the coal mines."

Enid listened with an air of interest, but hastened to break the pause with her own story:

"And when I found out I didn't love him, I lost my temper one day—and told him."

"That *was* foolish!" exclaimed Jennie.

"He then confessed to me that he didn't love me, either," said Enid.

"Probably said it just for spite."

"No. He meant it. The truth is we're not at all suited to each other. We bore each other."

"Why didn't you get a divorce?" asked Jennie.

"I hate scandal as much as you do. And I—well, I shrank from divorce. I don't think it's wicked or anything like that. The nicest kind of people do it freely nowadays. But—I'm very sensitive."

"I'd have tried to conquer my feelings," said Jennie. "But I found out that I couldn't get enough alimony to live on decently."

"I found out that, too," now confessed Enid. "In fact, I couldn't have got even a divorce without his consent."

"But he wanted a divorce—or pretended to—didn't he?"

Enid recklessly blurted out the last fact necessary to the full truth:

"Yes, but he'd give me only twenty-five a week alimony."

"How disgusting!" cried Jennie. "Why, the Prescotts are rich!"

"He said his salary was only fifty a week. But

that was just part of his stinginess. He owns a lot of stock in the company—and his father owns the rest. He said he hadn't paid his father for the stock—that he was saving and straining to pay, so he'd be independent. That was his excuse for making us live like a laborer's family—on fifty a week."

"Do you mean to tell me you *live* on *fifty* a *week!*" exclaimed Jenny.

"That's all he'll spend."

"Well, I'd not stand *that!*" cried Jennie.

"What would you do?"

Jennie looked blank. "I—I'd——" She laughed. "I'd stand it, I guess."

"Don't imagine I submitted without a lot of thinking," said Enid. "But—what's a woman to do?"

"I often wonder how other women manage to arrange those things so well."

"I've been looking into that," said Enid. "I always read about the divorces in the papers—and get what I can from people I talk with. I've found out that nearly all the divorces are either

among working people where the woman can get along about as well alone as with the man, or else among very rich people where the wife is rich as well as the husband—or something like that. But among our sort of people they don't do much divorcing." She smiled peculiarly. "And I guess you and I know it isn't for the buncombe reason you hear so much—that married people of middle fortune are happy and contented."

"Isn't it frightful to be as we are?" cried Jennie. "With all the fine instincts and tastes and all the longing for a beautiful life of emotion and sentiment, yet forced to be enslaved to men who think and care for nothing but business?"

There was a long pause. Then Enid said thoughtfully:

"Sometimes I'm almost tempted to give up hope—and settle down and be commonplace, like the rest of the women. Never have a dream—or an emotion—or a longing."

"But—even if you wanted to—mayn't he—didn't he——"

Jennie halted, conquered in the effort to express a thought so dangerous. But Enid understood. An expression of fear fluttered across the wistful, charming little face—charming to every one but her husband. Said she:

"That's why I can't join your private car party, Jen. I'm afraid—— When we had our big quarrel, he said he'd be paid up and free in about two years. We haven't spoken of it since. But——"

"The two years are about up?"

Enid nodded. "And he may—— Suppose he found some way to compel me to divorce him and take the twenty-five a week—— What *would* I do?"

She looked, appalled, at her sympathetic cousin. Said Jennie:

"He hasn't anything on you—has he?"

Enid shook her head with emphasis. "Not a thing. I've seen to that . . . Anyhow, there hasn't been a single temptation. Only men like him or much more so."

"It's been the same way with me," confessed

Mrs. Croly. "In the novels a man always turn up—the right sort of man. But—the novels aren't anything like life. They don't help you to live."

"They make it harder," said Enid. "It was the novels I read that gave me most of the ideas —that developed me so I wasn't suited to be the wife of a man like Walter. Now I simply *can't* narrow my horizon to his."

"Isn't it frightful?" said Jennie. "All these cravings that the right sort of man could satisfy. And no men of the right sort! . . . Yes, I have met two men in my life that were the right sort—or seemed to be. But they had no money, and couldn't make any. These two——" She laughed—"they didn't want marriage—didn't want to have anything to do with marriage. Isn't it *frightful?* What *is* the world coming to? What's to become of women?"

Depressed silence for a heavy moment. Then:

"Suppose he insists on the divorce—what *shall* I do?" asked Enid, arrived now at the point where the real cause of her confiding appeared.

Jennie was sympathetic, sad—and silent.

The genuine tragedies of life are three—poverty, disease and bereavement. All the others are simply vanities of bloated self-exaggeration. A sense of humor will mitigate them; common sense will cure them. It was evidence of real charm in Enid Prescott, it was a hopeful sign of the beginning of a readjustment of point of view, that she did not now look more deeply tragic or burst into weak noisy railings against men and destiny, but looked at her sad and silent cousin with a gleam of self-mockery in her siren eyes. Said she:

"You see, it's home sweet home for me on Thursday."

Jennie assented with a reluctant bend of her blonde head.

During the brief remainder of the visit the two young wives, more intimate than ever now that each possessed the other's secret, lost no opportunity to canvass their husbands. As each had tact and good taste, she was careful not to yield to any temptation to make original comment on the other's husband but to confine herself to flaw-

picking at her own bread-winner and to sympathetic generalities about the other. With Jennie's private opinions we need not encumber ourselves. But as Enid listened to Jennie on Sam, she was not always so sympathetic and assenting as she seemed. She saw signs of Jennie's being too prejudiced—of Jennie's deceiving herself as to her own righteousness and Sam's invariable wrongness—of Jennie's *almost* lying about Sam to make out a better case for herself. She even began to be disloyal in thought to Jennie—began to think better of Sam, to feel that her original impression of him as a decent sort, ahead of the run of men, had not been so far out of the way. "The trouble with Jennie," thought she, "is she's wholly wrapped up in herself. She's too vain. She attaches too much importance to herself. She wants to get everything and give nothing. Lazy as she is, lazy as Sam lets her be, she wants to be still lazier. Her dreams are simply of laziness disguised as 'higher life.' She's sweet and pretty. But—there are lots of sweet and pretty women. And mighty few of them are being taken care of

so well for just being sweet and pretty. She imagines she wants to be a serious person. But she really doesn't. She simply wants to be *taken* seriously without doing anything to deserve it. Sam has her sized up about right."

Something for nothing. The universe is founded upon the principle of blind selfishness. Progress is simply another name for giving sight and length of sight to selfishness. But progress is slow; the stupidity of primal instinct constantly reasserts itself. To get without giving—that is the dream of human nature in the crude. Men live by trade and commerce, women by love—using the word in its most inclusive sense. The basic principle of each is the same—to get something for nothing if possible; if not, then something for as near nothing as may be. To exchange that which has cost little for that which has cost much—and the difference is the profit. To fix up nothing so that it looks like something and to get for it a real something, a real value—that is success. But—to give an honest value and to get an equal value in return—where is the

profit? The women, trading in and upon love, imitate the men trading in labor and in goods real or reputed. The women no less than the men inherit the stupid, low instinct of something for nothing.

Thinking—not on her own case, but on her cousin's—Enid Prescott saw, dimly yet approachingly as one sees in the dawn, not recedingly as one sees in the evening dusk, that there was the man's side to this quarrel between the sexes. When two people have exchanged futile indiscreet confidences, they separate in a mood of dissatisfaction with themselves and with each other. Enid, on the train Lester-bound, was soon thinking of her cousin as a footless, ungrateful person, who was getting far better than she deserved. "If *I* had a man like Sam Croly to deal with——" There her thought halted for the obvious reason: How was *she* faring with the man she did have to deal with? Before condemning Jen, would she not do well to show in settling her own affairs some of the superior ability her criticism of Jen implied? True, her case was different, was far

more difficult. But—was not every case "different" and "far more difficult"?

As the distance from Wilkesbarre widened, and the distance to Lester narrowed, one thing appeared clearly to her: Both Jennie and she in marrying had taken a job. The idea might be coarse and low; but of what use to discuss that? Of about as much use as to rail against the quality of light supplied by the sun. "Walter doesn't want what I want to give—— By the way, just what *do* I want to give?" She was forced to laugh at herself—she who had unconsciously been learning about herself as she listened to Jennie. "I guess I don't want to give much of anything. I've been thinking only about what I want him to give. If I'd had good sense, if I'd been brought up right, I'd not have been thinking about that, but about how I was to keep and to better my job."

She recalled how she had been exasperated by servants who, seeking employment, had been able to talk only of how much they were to get, what free time they were to have, how little of the

work they would have to do, and so on. Nothing about trying to give satisfaction, trying to make themselves more and more useful, more and more valuable. Yet she herself had done precisely as those ignorant, short-sighted chuckle-heads! All because the truth about marriage, about the relations of the sexes, about life, had been hidden from her by a systematic false education that educated chiefly her vanity, that filled her with ridiculous notions about her own superior physical and mental value, that taught her to regard idle bootless dreaming and hazy, lazy aspiration and talk of aspiration as culture and superiority. Such thoughts as these visiting Enid now could arise only in a woman who had been severely chastised. But the matter had another and more important aspect. Most human beings take all the chastisements of fate as our less enlightened ancestors took illness. They do not consider that every effect must have a definite cause, that the cause of fate's chastisements can usually be found within the victim—that he is simply reaping as he has sown—or reaping poisonous weeds because he has

let those weeds sow themselves thick in his life. Self-excusing and self-pitying men and women crouch down, suffer the blows to rain upon their backs and moan about the cruelty and injustice of their sufferings. Enid Prescott was showing a significant variation from the type. She was as certain of her own innocence as is the next victim of fate. But she had the good sense to see that her innocence and the injustice of her lot were not going to remedy matters. Unless she bestirred herself, cruel and unjust fate would continue to be cruel and unjust. So, instead of giving her whole attention to railing and self pity she gave part of it to thinking how to better her condition.

As she traveled homeward it seemed to her that her two years of thinking had been in vain. And further, it seemed to her that continuing to think would be equally fruitless.

She was disappointed that her husband was not at the station to welcome her—or to make the pretense of welcome for appearance's sake. She knew he wouldn't be there; still, her heart grew heavier as she sought his face in vain. When she

reached the house, she was again disappointed. He was not there. Only the servant—Agnes—was there to receive her.

"Where's Mr. Prescott?" she asked.

"He told me to telephone if you came," replied Agnes. "Then he'll know whether to come here for supper or keep on at his father's."

"Telephone him, please," said Enid.

She was less heavy hearted, now that she was at home. It was the same modest cottage in which she and Walter had started their married life—instead of the large house she during courtship had assumed they would live in, as became the son and daughter-in-law of one of the magnates of Lester. It was the same, yet not the same. Up to the break between her and her husband, she had given no attention to the house. She was always hoping and expecting that Walter would be shamed into providing a fitting place for her. But with the break, with the realization that he would hold to the "mean and stingy" plan he had made and would not give her the things that were her right as a lady and the wife

of a rich man's son, she had been frightened into a different course.

Walter's view of life was sordid, his notion of woman and wife was shudderingly vulgar. But —*he* held the purse strings; and it behooved her —so prudence and good sense counseled—to do what she could to make him feel that she was "on the job."

The job! What a hideous distortion of the romantic beauty of love and marriage! Still—*he,* of the purse and the purse strings, looked on the position of wife as a "job." And until she should be free, independent of him, she must accept his view. Whenever there is a murder in a family, the detectives who come to investigate first look at the domestic appearances—how the house is kept, whether there is order or disorder, evidence of interest and content or of neglect and discontent. Certainly a detective, looking about that cottage, would have arrived at a verdict upon the state of mind of the inmates very wide of the truth as it appeared to Walter and Enid. The house was perfectly kept. On every side

there were evidences of the thought and pains that are usually set down to love alone. Your detective would have said: "This is the home of a woman interested in her house, interested in the welfare of her husband, and seeking to make him comfortable, and accomplishing it with unusual skill. This is a happy home—a happy wife, a happy husband."

Enid was glad to be home, was pleased with her home. As she went from room to room, before taking off her hat and gloves, she admired her own handiwork. "I've done well, considering how little he gave me to do it with. He certainly has no cause to complain that I haven't done my share." Still in hat and gloves she went to the kitchen to see how the preparations for supper were coming on. She had never seen a sign of dissatisfaction in Walter's face, had never had a cross or a criticising word from him since the break. But knowing that he did not love her, knowing that she was in his power—unless she was willing to take a place in a shop or at some sort of domestic service—she had never been re-

assured about him. And returning with the sense of her helplessness stronger than ever, and with the fear of that divorce like a frightful fiend treading upon her very heels, she was in a panic lest something might go wrong that first evening.

She was in dread of his coming; she could hardly wait for him to come. She had a presentiment that the awful unsettled question was to be settled at once.

Walter came at six o'clock—the supper hour, exactly. That two weeks' "vacation" was the first time they had been apart—that is, had not seen each other every day. Thus, they looked each at the other with the seeing eye so rare in matrimony. She found him in the actuality much better looking than she had been thinking. It even seemed to her that he was better looking than she had thought him when they married. Then, she had an "ideal man"; and Walter Prescott had seemed to her far short of that ideal, though she had striven hard to idealize him. Now, she was no longer under the sway of the romantic notions. The anxieties, the duties of the

practical routine of life had gotten her out of the romancing habit. Looking at Walter as just a man, she was surprised to find that, at least in outward appearance, he compared most favorably with the men who walk about the earth, as distinguished from the men walking through novels and poems and girl-dreams. Walter, on his side, saw with something of his old-time interest the undeniably pretty face, wistful and wide-eyed and wide of mouth, and the slim, nervous young body.

They shook hands with a little embarrassment. "Have a good time?" said he.

"So-so," replied she. "Everything all right at your mother's?"

"Oh, yes. She took good care of me."

Enid winced. That remark reminded her how unimportant she was to Walter—therefore, how unimportant in the world. For, unless she was necessary to him, she was necessary to nobody on earth—and beyond question she was not necessary to him.

After supper they went, as usual, to the sitting-

room. He smoked, she worked at a set of doilies she was making as a wedding present. During those two years, in that small house in which they were at all times jam up against each other, they had been always upon the friendliest of terms. About the only surface difference between their home life and the life of a happy young married couple was that they never quarreled. In all that time never once had either brought up the subject of the estrangement, though he thought of it often and it was never wholly out of her mind. But that evening she knew it was going to come up, in some form. As she bent over her work, making the delicate stitches, she was waiting for him to speak—to tell her that her fate was settled. . . . And—— Beyond question she was not necessary to him—or even especially useful. Not necessary, not even especially useful, to any one in the world.

She glanced furtively at him—saw that he was lost in his thoughts—if men thought when they were smoking those big important looking cigars—or did they simply look as if they were think-

ing, when in fact they were wholly absorbed in the service of the cigar? At any rate he was not observing her; so, she could observe him openly and freely. . . . Yes, there was a great deal of character in his face—of strength, of tenacity. She always had thought so. That had reconciled her to taking one so different from her ideal—that, and his money. Why was she suddenly taking such a favorable view of the man—of a life—she had all along been thinking she detested? Because she was afraid she was about to lose the man, to be thrust out of the life, into an alternative that was repellent in every way.

She was gazing wistfully at him. Our prime necessity—to make our bodies comfortable—is material. Hence, the material ever dominates us, lies at the base of our actions. The wise mother, wishing her child to love her, pursues the same course as the master of a new dog and sees to it that no one but herself ever gives the child food. Enid's fascinating little face was wistful as she looked at the man who held her destiny in his hands. She was ashamed of her lack of pride.

She would not have confessed her secret thoughts to any one in the world. But she would have been grateful for a friendly look from him.

He stirred—he was coming out of his abstraction. She glanced hastily down at her work. Said he:

"Well—I think I'll go to bed. I've had a hard day."

As he rose, her heart seemed to stand still. For, she all at once felt that she was missing a chance—*the* chance. What was the important thing? To make up with him if possible—and as far as he was willing. If he would not make up, then to put him in a position in which he could not send her away with twenty-five dollars a week. Obviously this was the sensible, the immediate thing. Pride sneered; but would pride pay bills? In two years pride—and chance—and aspiration —and all the other gods had been appealed to in vain. She must deal with her own peculiar destiny in the only way it would consent to dealing. She ought to be glad he wasn't positively repulsive to her—that "making the best of it" wouldn't be

such a horrible humiliation, after all. And now was the time—now—this evening of the home coming when her instinct told her he was unusually well disposed toward her.

She glanced up at him. She could make her smile singularly sweet when she chose. It had never been sweeter. Said she:

"You don't *look* tired. But then you are tremendously strong. You're carrying the whole burden of the factory now—aren't you?"

"I like it," said he. "Father lets me alone. He'll retire soon."

Her heart sank; but she hid it. She asked:

"He and your mother'll be taking that trip round the world, perhaps?"

"That's just talk," answered he. "Mother couldn't go. Neither would father, though he pretends it's she that keeps him. But they may do the Far West. . . . Mother wants us to live in the house while they're gone."

She made a wry face—and it was not pretense. "We're so comfortable here," said she.

He glanced round. "Yes, it *is* comfortable,"

he admitted. "I didn't realize how comfortable we were until I went back home for these last two weeks." He looked at her with a friendly embarrassed smile. "You certainly have learned your business."

She beamed.

He, still more awkwardly: "I haven't been quite fair with you. My salary was raised a year ago—to five thousand a year. I haven't been giving you your share."

She looked amused. "Oh, I've had plenty. And those debts must be paid."

He colored violently, was plainly much disturbed by this startling about-face. "You've changed your mind about that, then?" said he, reseating himself in his embarrassment.

"One changes as one grows older—and learns," replied she. It amazed her to find herself moving along the highway of hypocrisy with such a sure and swift foot. "I was a foolish girl. You should have had better sense than to have taken me seriously then."

"The debts are paid," he confessed with boy-

ish shamefacedness. "Father canceled them a year ago."

The blood was buzzing in her ears. Then she had been in imminent danger a whole year! *Why* hadn't he told her—and settled the open account between them? Perhaps because his father and mother were set against divorce. Yes—that was beyond doubt the reason, the only reason. And she frowned down the suggestion woman's vanity was prompt to make.

He was explaining:

"I didn't care to open the subject again, as I still wasn't in a position to settle things. You know, father and mother are hopelessly old-fashioned about divorce. Father made me promise I'd not move until you did."

He was looking at her expectantly. She said —pale but apparently calm:

"Really—I've not been thinking about it."

"I'm glad," said he. "I was afraid you were worrying. *I* had my business to occupy me."

She laughed—and no one could have guessed how nervous she was. "I've had *my* business,

too," said she. "The house to look after—and clothes to make—and all sorts of odds and ends. My life's been pretty full."

"I suppose," said he reflectively, "that's why we've jogged along so comfortably. Both of us have had about all we could find time for."

Now was her chance—now or never. She became radiant. "I think we have been pretty good friends," said she with a look and a smile he could interpret as he liked.

He nodded. "We're a lot more successful as friends than as husband and wife."

She sank to woman's deepest sweep of humiliation—with the manner of a proud, frank, good-comrade. She said:

"What a little idiot I was! How patient you were with me!"

He was not to be outdone in generosity. "I wasn't as decent as I might have been. I lost my temper and said a lot of things—— They were true enough, but I ought to have kept them to myself." He laughed, went on with an apologetic look. "You did rile me, with your cool as-

sumption that I was crazy about you when, in fact, I was as much disappointed in married life as you were."

She took her up-starting and bristling vanity by the scruff and flung it back into its cage and slammed the door on it. She said sweetly:

"I guess it was an instinct that you were disappointed that set me going."

He looked at her thoughtfully. "You certainly have changed," was his verdict.

"You couldn't expect me to stand still."

"Most women do."

"No, they go backward," corrected she. "But"—smiling brightly at him—"you didn't give me the chance. You'll not believe it, Walt, but I'm grateful to you. You *made* me wake up."

He shrugged his shoulders and rose. "Well—it's me for bed. I'm glad you've forgiven me."

She was desperate. She said pensively:

"Good night. What a pity it is that people don't start right—can't start right because they don't know."

"Oh—there's no use in regret," said he sooth-

ingly. "We'll straighten things out, and next time we'll both know what we're about."

His tone and manner were discouraging. She did not dare let herself be discouraged. She had to hope—and her hope was that he was using this indifferent manner to conceal a relenting toward her. She rose and drew near him. She posed her slim nervous young body before him and gazed with wistful eyes, the fascinating wide mouth at a particularly becoming and inviting angle. She held out her hand.

"I want to thank you—and to ask you to forgive me," she said. "And I am *glad* to be—home!"

Her eyes filled. There was a momentary response in his eyes. She thought he was about to kiss her. But the look in his eyes changed from tender to quizzical, to laughing, and he said with an amused shake of the head as he took and dropped her hand:

"You and Jen Croly must have had a serious talk on the subject of the care and feeding of husbands."

She hid her angry confusion, said merrily:

"We did, indeed. That's why I'm so meek."

Audacious frankness won. The artifice of abandoning artifice snatched victory from the claw of defeat. He laughed and kissed her.

"You're a clever girl," said he, in his voice that note of male weakness for attractive female for which women listen, as the general watches the enemy's battlements for the flutter of the white flag.

Eight months later. The elder Prescott and his wife had bought in Pasadena, and had settled there for the rest of their lives. The younger Prescott and his wife had moved into the big house. Sam Croly was dead of pneumonia—and his crepe-swathed contented widow was visiting Cousin Enid. She soon disclosed the chief object of her visit. Said she:

"I want to go abroad—for a long stay. And you are coming with me, Enid."

Enid shook her head sadly. "No—I must stick to my job."

"You needn't ever think of it again," cried Jennie. "Sam left me very well off. The insurance alone was enough to live on, and there were stocks and bonds." She wiped her eyes. "Ah, he was *such* a smart fellow! . . . And now I want you to be free, too. I'll make any arrangement you like. And you'll be sure to meet a sympathetic man abroad."

Enid sighed. "No—I must stay here."

"But I can't bear to think of you as unhappy."

"Oh, I'm not—not miserable, dear," replied Enid with a tranquility that was convincing. "After I left you I decided to stop—stop admiring and longing for the two birds in the bush and to see what I could do with the bird in the hand."

Jennie kissed her tenderly. "Poor child!" she said. "How you must have suffered."

"Yes, I was pretty nervous until I had a good hold on the bird in my hand," replied Enid practically. "But—since then—well, it's astonishing how you can grow to like what you've got to like."

"Never!" cried Jennie. "We women may sub-

mit, but we *hate*. You can't hide yourself from me, dear. I know what you think in your secret heart. And you must come with me."

"You're mistaken, Jen," replied Enid earnestly. "Honestly, you are. I don't hate him. In fact, I *like* him."

Jennie shook her head, unconvinced. She knew women, and no woman of spirit——

"Yes—like him tremendously," interrupted Enid. "I've grown hopelessly practical, Jen. I'm comfortable, and nothing could induce me to take chances again."

"You don't mean to pretend that you *love* him!" exclaimed the young widow, a picture of blonde amazement framed in crinkled becoming black.

"Not what *you'd* call love, perhaps—or what I'd have called love in my poetry and novel days," said Enid, opening her work basket and taking out some sewing. "But—I'm contented. I don't want anything different." She smiled peculiarly. "And if any one tried to take him away from me——"

She left the sentence unfinished. There was in her vigorous nod a suggestion of fierce battle—battle to the death. Jennie gazed sorrowfully at that exterior of mystery and allure wasted upon a stove manufacturer of Lester, Pa., upon that interior once adorned with poetry and romance, now soberly furnished like a substantial domestic sitting-room. Abruptly she said:

"Why, Enid—what's that queer little thing you're working on?"

Enid laughed and blushed and held it up defiantly.

WHITE ROSES AND RED

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I

THAT year it was the fad to be "quiet"; also Mrs. Bristow always had abhorred ostentation. So, early in January she sent out about seven hundred informal little notes in her secretary's close imitation of her handwriting: "We'll be glad if you'll dine with us at Sherry's on February 16th at eight o'clock. There'll be dancing afterward. Hoping you will come, sincerely yours, Alice Bristow." Then she began to make ready for the twelve or fifteen hundred people who would surely accept.

She took half the ground floor at Sherry's and the whole of the second floor. She moved into an apartment on the third floor four days before the ball—leaving her house in East Sixty-seventh Street in charge of the housekeeper and directing her husband to find everything except lodging and

breakfast at his club or downtown. She assembled an army of florists and decorators and kept them at work day and night. She walled and ceilinged Sherry's ballroom with white roses and white brocaded silk; she made ante-rooms and stairways into bowers and lanes of blooming white rose bushes; she transformed the lower rooms, where dinner and supper were to be served, into a huge white rose garden with rustic pavilions on banks of moss, with graveled walks winding among tables set upon turf, with a brook skurrying under foot-bridges and now tumbling in a cascade, now bursting in a fountain. She hid cages of songbirds among the branches of transplanted trees. She ordered articles of gold and silver and semi-precious stones, of costly lace and hand-painted silk for cotillon favors. She engaged an orchestra for upstairs, a gypsy band for downstairs. And to perform upon a rustic stage in the midst of the garden during dinner and supper she hired men singers and women singers, jesters and tumblers and dancers and players upon strange instruments.

At a quarter past eight on the evening of the sixteenth she descended from her apartment for a final look around and a final disposition of her forces before stationing herself in the big reception room to receive that part of New York which she and her friends meant when they said "everybody." She was deeply rouged, but it did not hide the hollowness of her cheeks, the weariness of her eyes. Behind her at a respectful distance came her butler, Tremlett. As she appeared at the turn of the stairway, a half dozen young men advanced to meet her—the young men of her "train." They, too, had taken rooms at Sherry's; and they had acted as her aides-de-camp. They had dressed early, to be ready when she should appear. Surrounded by this "train" and attended, at a respectful distance, by her butler and several of Sherry's principal men, she made the tour. Her small, well-shaped head was nodding this way and that; her long, slender arms—in neck and arms she was still like a young woman—were constantly moving to the horizontal to point out some small defect which must be remedied; and

her clear, resolute voice was heard in incessant criticism and command. She returned alone to the reception room; her "train" and the servants were all busy carrying out her last orders.

It was half past eight and no one had come; in the dressing rooms were gathered a few who had not heard or had not believed the warning that had gone round that it was to be a very late affair. Just as Downey, the first of her "train" to finish his task, came up, breathing heavily and wiping the sweat from his face with a handkerchief as big as himself, her restless, searching eyes caught a mere glimpse of a skirt at the far end of the long hallway, near the women's dressing rooms.

"There's Georgina!" she said. "Go and bring her to me."

Downey darted along the hallway and presently returned, looking unimportant beside the taller, obviously nervous young girl he was escorting. Georgina came to a standstill about two yards from the small, erect figure of her mother,

draped in fashionable scantiness and simplicity, and blazing with jewels.

"Oh, Mother! Mother!" exclaimed the girl. And her eyes sparkled and her breath came quickly and the color spread in a soft flush over her delicate, smooth skin.

"And it's all for *me*. What *can* I say?"

Mrs. Bristow looked at her daughter—the look of one who never fails to see a fault if fault there be.

"*Say* anything you please, my dear," she replied. "But don't *do* anything—at least not to me. It took Clarice two awful hours to put me together, not to speak of the masseuse. And you could undo it all in one second."

Georgina laughed, more because she was so young and well and happy than at her mother's good-natured cautioning against "demonstrations." Georgina had led the most secluded of lives. Of her eighteen years the first twelve had been spent in the country, always guarded by a governess. She even knew her brother, older than herself, only in a distant, stiff sort of way.

At thirteen she had gone to the convent and had stayed there, with brief, formal visits home twice a year, until a month before this, her coming-out ball.

"Georgina shall be innocent," Mrs. Bristow had insisted. She herself had been brought up in the American fashion. But, while she did not think badly of the results in her case, she attributed her escape to her own superiority, not to any merits in the system—that she regarded as wholly pernicious, to say nothing of its vulgarity. "I shall take no chances," she had declared. "Georgina shall know, hear, see, think nothing but what is pure and good. Then, when she faces the facts of life, she will be so firmly established in the right that wrong will be impossible."

And she had been delighted when her daughter, in the third year at the convent, developed a passionate religious enthusiasm and talked of "taking the veil." Mr. Bristow had no time to spare from downtown even for his wife; the children he left entirely to her. But this talk of "the veil" made him nervous, and he ventured to suggest to

his wife that it might end in more than "just talk" and "an emotional girl's taking the nearest outlet for a sentimentalism which the first breath of real life will kill." Mrs. Bristow had waved him aside—the sisters wouldn't dare encourage the girl beyond a certain point; if they did, how would a child of hers disobey her whom no one disobeyed, not even impudent servants? But Georgina's father was not wholly satisfied. At the first opportunity he could conveniently make, he privately led her, his only daughter, aside and cross-examined her with the shrewdness that had graduated him from a corporation lawyer into a corporation owner. Georgina assured him that her religious ideal was not for seclusion but for action.

"I want to live in the world," she said with kindling eyes. "I want to try to be useful and to do all I can to make it less full of sorrow and pain."

Mr. Bristow nodded approval of this; and Georgina was so absorbed in her romantic vague, purely theoretical, ideas of "sorrow and pain"

that she did not note the queer gleam in his eyes. Toward his daughter's young enthusiasm he was tender where toward another's he would have been frankly cynical—for, in his fifty years' experience of dollar worshippers he had found nothing that encouraged him to try to get warmth from any fire of reform. "The world's a pretty good world, Georgie," he said, "a pretty comfortable, cheerful world, if you don't irritate it, and don't expect anything of it."

On this February sixteenth, with the music thrilling, with the odors of flowers and of perfumes stronger if less natural making the air sensuous, with the women in beautiful jewels and dresses, with the men, seen hazily in the mass, handsome and manly, with smiles and pleasure everywhere, with heartaches and toil and storm like phantoms of a vanished dream—on this night Georgina did not once think of that romantic "sorrow and pain" she was romantically to devote her life to lightening. "It is so beautiful to live, so wonderful!" she thought again and again as she laughed and danced and chattered and flitted

about in gauzy white with bare rosy shoulders glistening and a face that suggested her own favorite white roses gleaming under its simple gorgeous crown of auburn hair.

She was, indeed, a fascinating expression of life —not very tall, yet above the medium height; the well advanced beginnings of a graceful figure; features not too regular for feeling nor too irregular for the harmonies of those outgivings of the mind and heart that beautify faces as well as character. And her eyes, clear and innocent, seemed to be finding in her surroundings an essence of nobility so delicate and fine that it could not be felt by the blunter coarsened sense of the sophisticated.

Her partner had gone to get her a glass of water. The dinner, the cotillon, the supper were over; most of the older people were gone—all, in fact, except those who were ruled by their daughters or who had daughters not easy to marry off and so not to be removed from the display while there was a chance of attracting a customer. Georgina, sitting apart, was glad to be alone for

a moment that she might enjoy the more keenly, without the distraction of having to talk and to listen. Her thoughts were drifting in vague ecstasy upon the billows of waltz music when she became conscious that some definite person was near-by, was just in front of her, was watching her intently.

She gathered herself together. She did not like the look—just why she could not have said. When a child sees that sort of look in the eyes of a grown person watching it at play, it stops playing and feels somehow rebuked for being able to enjoy such folly. Yet it wasn't a look of pity, or of amusement or of condescension. As she was noting it and before she had time to be made uncomfortable by it, it gave place to another expression, one which stirred in her the instinct that makes a child, after a glance, go straight to a stranger and court him. She was smiling expectantly up at a tallish, slender man, with a good deal of gray in his dark hair and some in his narrow dark mustache, with strength in his frame and the habit of luxurious outdoor life in his com-

plexion—polo and hunting and shooting and yachts. Her partner came with the water; beside this curiously magnetic stranger he seemed awkward and ill-dressed. And the first shadow came upon Georgina's evening—she was for the first time discriminating among her sensations, was seeing the contrasts in the crowd. Without effort and without exertion, neither by saying nor by doing nor by looking, but just by simply being, this man had lowered the others, had exalted himself, and it was at their expense. She noticed that her partner was almost deferential toward "Mr. Fenton," that several men in a near-by group were watching him furtively with admiring envy.

"I came to say good night," he said, putting out his hand with a slight bow that yet seemed to her somehow to confer a distinction upon her. "Good night to Mademoiselle White Rose, and to tell her that her mother wishes to see her—she's over there behind that wide man with the narrow head." And he bowed again and was gone.

She had been thinking of things—of crowds and lights and perfumes and music and partners and favors. Now all these merged into background for a person—a personality. "Who is Mr. Fenton?" she asked, as she went with her partner toward her mother.

"Oh—he's——" The young man looked blank. Everybody knew about Fenton. Nobody had ever been called on to define him. "Fenton?" he went on. "Oh, he's—*he's* all right."

Georgina's look caused him to fear he had not made himself quite clear.

"He's been everywhere and done everything," he explained. "He—he—well, he 'knows how.' Whether it's breaking hearts or horses, buying pictures or clothes—or whatever it is—he 'knows how.' He's—well, he's—Fenton."

"Oh," said Georgina. "Oh, yes."

When she joined her mother's group they were talking of Fenton. The "wide man with the narrow head" was chattering from a wide mouth: "And Fenton accepted her brother's challenge, they say, and of course he had the poor Belgian

at his mercy. But he only pricked him in the sword-wrist—just to end the duel."

"I'm sure Fenton cared nothing about her," said Mrs. Bristow. "Everybody knows that he——" She caught sight of her daughter listening with frank thirstiness. "I detest scandal, anyway," she added. "Women have been trying to make a fool of Fenton ever since he went into trousers, and they've only succeeded in making him the wariest bachelor in New York. Georgina, one more dance, just one—then you must go —must take your father home. He's been blighting the ball with his yawns."

The wide man asked for that last dance. As he bore her away she said: "Who is Mr. Fenton?"

"Fenton? Why, he's—all right."

"So I've heard," said Georgina. "But what does that mean?"

The wide man grinned in a gossip's familiar, insinuating way. "Oh, you're too young to know, as the song says."

She did not urge him to explain, as he ob-

viously hoped she would. It was five o'clock. The roses were faded or fading; the floors were strewn with fallen and torn and stained white petals. Most of the remaining men and a few of the women had been too often to the supper room. Their laughter, their familiarities with one another jarred upon Georgina's tired nerves. The musicians were playing wearily and only the very young girls like herself looked fresh and bright—they merely by contrast with the older women. Her mother's eyes were black circled and her cheeks were haggard. Georgina was glad to go.

As she fell asleep, with the music still beating in her nerves, she was thinking of Fenton, of the fascinating mystery of him. "Who *is* Mr. Fenton?" she wondered. "And what is it about him that makes me think of him as the only person who was at my ball?"

II

EARLY in May, Fenton went up to the Carnarvons' on the Hudson; and one afternoon a few days later he set out alone in a small automobile to call at the Bristows', twenty miles away. When he had been going about half an hour he saw in a narrow stretch of the road ahead of him a young woman with a bulldog at her heels. He slowed down to well within the legal speed limit and signaled. The young woman stopped and stood at the roadside. The dog dropped as if he had been shot and disposed himself in the most restful posture possible that he might take the fullest advantage of the halt. But at sight of Fenton he rose, twitching his tightly curled tail excitedly and spreading over his hideous, friendly countenance a look of frantic delight.

"That's Bristow's 'Monseigneur,'" thought Fenton, as he went by.

The girl was bowing to him, and he bowed in return without recognizing her. "Some one stopping with them," he thought. Then he remembered: "Yes—it's Mrs. Bristow's girl." He had noted the weariness of the dog and on impulse he stopped his auto, turned it and went back. When he was abreast of her and her dog, he stopped again. "How d'ye do, Miss Bristow," he said. "Can't I give you a lift? You're at least seven miles from home."

"Not 'cross country," she replied with a bright flush and a stammer of embarrassment. "I think —I'll just—just walk home, thank you."

"But 'Mons' "—he persisted, convinced that only excessive shyness kept her from accepting.

At sound of the name by which every one who knew him well called him, "Mons" snorted joyfully and with an awkward scrambling leap seated himself in the auto in front of the vacant seat. Thence he looked at his mistress, as if to say, "You may be as foolish as ever you like. But I'm going to do the sensible thing."

"Poor 'Mons'!" said the girl, reaching over and

rubbing her hand up his short, squeezed-in face. "I ought to be ashamed to drag you so far when it's so hard for you to breathe."

Fenton descended from the auto, went round and stood beside her. "I'm on my way to your place," he said, shaking hands with her. "You see, 'Mons' has decided your destiny for you. Surely you wouldn't trifle with fate."

"I might—if I weren't tired," replied Georgina, and she stepped into the seat beside his.

They were off and she was trembling so that she steadied one of her bare brown hands with the other. She was in a whirl of amazement that her dream had thus come true. For, while she had not seen him in the eleven weeks since the ball, she had thought of him more and more. Wherever she had gone, she had heard of him—not always, or even usually, things she thought she approved of, but always things that increased his mystery and his charm. Many women had loved him and he—well, he had at least let them. That was a disappointment; her ideal man, so she told herself, was he who waited in purity and

patience for the one woman. Still, wasn't there something to be said for the man who, when he chose the one woman, chose her with the open eyes of experience? A wicked, unwomanly thought, Georgina reproached herself, but she couldn't help thinking it.

She was watching him steadily and wondering about those vague "others" now—it wasn't strange that they had liked that "different" air, that look of strength through the shoulders and neck, emphasized by the manly profile with plenty of nose and chin in it. "I haven't seen you since my coming-out party," she said, as he glanced round at her.

"No. I don't go about much these——" He smiled—a slow lighting up of a pair of keen gray eyes—"these last twenty odd years."

She laughed. It sounded like a joke, though she knew that this oldish young man had been several years out of college when her mother had cast aside her last short dress for her first long one twenty-four years before.

"I should think you wouldn't care to go,"

she replied. "One season has been quite enough for me."

She saw just a suggestion of a smile of raillery in his profile.

"Oh, I don't mean *that,*" she hastened to add. "But I was brought up quietly and got such a different idea of enjoyment. It isn't that I'm bored with living. I'm only bored with *not* living. I don't call it living to dress several times a day and rush from place to place, eating when I'm not hungry, talking when I've nothing to say, listening when there's nothing to hear, laughing when I really want to yawn and go to sleep."

He glanced at her with interest; she felt, with a thrill of self-congratulation, that she was lifting herself for him out of the class sweet and silly. "Oh," he said. "Then why do you do it?"

"Mother would be disappointed if I didn't. Besides, what else is there to do? I hate to stay alone *all* the time. And mother won't have me in her set. She says it's only for married people and that it spoils for marriage the girls that go in it."

Fenton looked thoroughly amused. He wondered whether she knew that her mother's chief reason for keeping her daughter out of her set was the absence from it of marrying men. "You'll simply have to marry," he said with gentle mockery. "I know how girls hate the very idea of it, but your case is desperate."

She was overwhelmed with shyness—it was impossible for her ever to pretend to trifle upon that subject with this man. But he was not observing her; his mind had wandered off to something far from her. Presently she said: "That's not easy."

He recalled with some difficulty what they had been talking of and replied: "Oh, you needn't let that worry you. When the time comes your mother'll find you the right sort of man. And you'll love him dearly, and—all that—*Damn!*"

They had just swung round a sharp curve and were not thirty yards from a team of four farm horses dragging a clumsy wagon and filling the whole road. Before she fully grasped the meaning of this to them, darting forward at the rate

of fifteen or twenty miles an hour, he said sharply: "Sit still. I'll take our only chance." And, as he said it, he put one arm round her so tightly that she could not have moved, and with the other shut off the power, put on the brake and turned the auto sharply to the right. It rushed through the wire fence, up the bank, across a narrow level. Then it sprang out into space. Georgina neither uttered a sound nor closed her eyes. She shut her teeth hard together. She saw and felt herself swinging in the air, heard the auto strike far below.

He was clinging to a tree with one arm and one leg, was holding her in the other arm. The auto had fallen to the bottom of the cliff—she could see it through the torn branches and bushes. They had darted into a narrow gully; twenty feet to either side and the auto would have run safely along a smooth slope.

"You must be quick," he was saying; she looked up into his face—it was gray-white, and his eyes were heavy and dull. "Quick!" he repeated. "Catch the tree and draw yourself in."

She obeyed him.

"Safe?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, and stretched out her hand to help him.

But as soon as he heard her "Yes," his hold upon the tree relaxed and his body went crashing down. Before she realized what had happened, she heard it strike—a dead sound, like a finality.

"Oh!" she shuddered, covering her face. Behind her came the tramp of hasty heavy feet. She straightened herself.

"Down there! Follow me!" she said to the two farm hands from the wagon. And she darted along the slope, broke through the creepers, and plunged down the steep—sliding, stumbling, leaping. With torn hands and scratched and bleeding face she was kneeling beside him; with gentle, tremulous fingers she was brushing the sand and mud from his face. He had fallen upon a mound of muddy sand, had struck it at a lucky angle, had slid along and was half covered with earth. His eyes opened in a stupid stare. Intelligence came gradually, and with a faint smile he said:

"Why, I'm not dead."

"No—no," she replied, drawing back now that he was conscious. The tears rushed from her eyes; then came sobs and queer little bursts of laughter! "Thank God! Thank God!" And she clasped her hands and began murmuring a Latin prayer. But before she had finished she swayed and fainted.

III

WHEN Georgina came to, the farm hands were lifting Fenton to a broad board that they had brought from the side of the wagon bed. He was unconscious. She staggered to her feet, dipped a corner of her skirt in the near-by pool of water, and washed the dirt from his face and cooled his forehead and temples. The stern set of his features relaxed.

The two men carried him up the hill, holding him to keep his body from slipping off. They lifted him to the wagon, which was half full of straw; and with his head in her lap, the slow journey toward home began. He opened his eyes several times, and bit his lip to suppress a groan. Once he said: "You really weren't hurt?"

But she couldn't tell whether he heard her reassuring negative.

This agitation burst upon the tranquil house

party at the Bristows', just as they were gathering in the library for tea.

Straightway every one set about making the most of the break in the monotony. The doctor came from the village; a second and a third came from the town seven miles away; finally a fourth arrived from New York, bringing two trained nurses. Poor Fenton was gone over again and again, for it seemed incredible that he was suffering only from a mighty shaking up, many bruises, three bad sprains, and a broken leg. Besides, each doctor was bound to justify the bill he had resolved to send, as soon as he had learned to whose house and for whom he was summoned. And Georgina was put to bed, and was examined thoroughly by each of the four and by the four together. She was pronounced an invalid in disregard of her protests, and was sent off to sleep by a stiff hypodermic.

Toward night Fenton waked up. "What became of 'Mons'?" he asked the nurse.

No one had thought of him. Next day they found his body twenty feet from the auto,

stretched on a table of stone. He had leaped as the auto left the edge of the cliff, and had broken his neck.

"I simply *can't* leave Georgie behind," said Mrs. Bristow.

She was in bed in a bedroom done in pale blue silk—walls, furniture, curtains, canopy, coverlid; and her nightgown was of pale blue silk with real lace at the neck and sleeves. She looked young and pretty. When she was dressed she seemed somewhat older, and too strong a character to have such a word as "pretty" applied to her. Although only her sister and frequent substitute, Miss Martha Chase, was with her, her toilet was made to the last carefully arranged lock. For, nowadays, she permitted no one, not even her maid, to see her before she had effaced or lightened the marks of the years since thirty.

"And, on the other hand," she went on, "I *can't* take her with me." The first "can't" had been said dubiously; this second was very resolute.

"I don't see why not," replied her sister.

"Why not what?" demanded Mrs. Bristow, instantly irritated.

"Whichever you please," answered her sister with a smile. She had been a belle until she was thirty, but had hesitated too long, in a day when marriage meant the end instead of the beginning. During these last fifteen years of settled spinsterhood she had experienced daily practice in self-sacrifice and self-effacement. And she was a witness, daily, to the ingenious and ingenuous selfishness of her luckier sister. She was the working or drudging head of the Bristow household, and, in exchange for the genteel satisfaction of being "one of the family" instead of a paid employee, she gave service worth ten times her modest keep. "You'll do as you please," she continued. "You always did. You always do."

"But how can I take her with me, Martha," said her sister, "when the doctors have ordered me to go to Aix for a *serious* cure?"

Martha knew that a "serious cure" at Aix meant a bath, exercise, massage, and a nap in the morning; with gambling, flirting, and dancing

from luncheon on until midnight, or later. But she was not argumentative, not the least bit spiteful. So she replied: "You can't, my dear. Besides, why shouldn't you leave her?"

"With Fenton laid up here for weeks and weeks, not sick enough to stay in bed, yet not able to go away?"

"But I'll be here."

"You can't keep Georgie away from him."

"Why should I?"

Mrs. Bristow looked reflective. "I'd thought of that," she said, absently. "He's not in the least likely to fall in love with her, really. But then—there's Mrs. Sylvester."

"She couldn't get at him here. She's in Europe anyhow."

"I saw in the papers yesterday that she was sailing for America next Saturday—the day I am —that is, the day I had planned to sail for Aix. . . . Besides," Mrs. Bristow hesitated a long time before going on slowly, "I'm not quite sure I'd like it if he were to want Georgina. He's too old—inside, I mean. He knows too much.

What chance would Georgina have against him? And she'd love him to death for a year or so—and—then what? No, I'd prefer a younger man."

"So would Georgie, no doubt," replied Martha.

"Yes, I think I'll sail." Mrs. Bristow sat up, threw aside the covers, and thrust a foot into one of the slippers on the big white bearskin at the edge of the bed. "There's hardly a chance of those two bothering each other. No, he'd never do it. He's not a marrying man."

"Every man is a marrying man, just as every woman's a marrying woman," answered Miss Chase.

"Well, watch them, Martha. I trust to your judgment." Whenever Mrs. Bristow trusted anything to some one else's judgment, it was because she was not especially interested. "Anyhow, he's a man of honor, and would not trifle with a *girl*."

Three days before sailing she sent for Georgina to come to her sitting room. As her daughter entered she said: "No, don't sit. Just stand

there a minute and let me look at you." And Georgina, with an amused smile, mockingly posed for inspection. "There's certainly no reason to be ashamed of you," said her mother, with a quick approving nod of her small, graceful head.

"Thank you kindly, ma'am," answered Georgie, with a curtsy.

"I sent for you, dear," her mother went on, "because I wanted to have a serious talk with you before I go away. I wanted to take you with me, but the doctor insisted that I must be quiet. And how could I be quiet if I had you on my conscience—was always looking out to see that you enjoyed yourself?"

Georgina looked relieved and cheerful and said nothing. She did not analyze her mother ever—she was perfect! Still being with mother meant being sent away whenever anyone interesting came, or anything interesting was about to be said; meant going early to bed, mournfully conscious that the fun would not begin until she was gone.

"It's most disagreeable, this leaving you here when Fenton is in the house," went on her mother, "but there's no help for it. And of course you'll keep to yourself as much as possible—as much as you courteously can. Martha is the real hostess. Only—don't avoid him. You needn't have any shyness about him, for he's old enough to be your—well, almost, to be your grandfather."

"He's only forty-seven," said Georgie, earnestly.

"*Only* forty-seven!" Mrs. Bristow gave her daughter a look that made her flush.

"And he's so much more intelligent than the other men I know," Georgie couldn't help being frank, but she was wretched in it. "And—and—so much more worth while." She was determined to remove the prejudice against Fenton in her mother's mind.

Mrs. Bristow smiled with careful carelessness.

"Look out, child, He's a dangerous man. But, of course, my daughter couldn't fall in love with

any man unless he were first in love with her. Besides, the surest way to lose a man is to show him that you care especially for him," and there Mrs. Bristow dropped the subject.

IV

IT happened that Fenton's rooms were in the left wing, overlooking the drive. Thus, each morning as he lay propped at the bay window, well screened in, he saw Georgie going for her regular ride. Then strength came back to him, and the power of some motion without pain; and his eyes and his mind, eagerly searching for distraction, found in the handsome young woman on her handsome horse the bright event of a long, black, boresome day.

When the groom passed, leading the horse toward the main entrance, beyond view from Fenton's outlook, his eyes lit up and his mind got ready to make the most of a brief bit of sunshine. When she appeared, a thrill ran through him that would have been impossible, would have seemed ludicrous, had he not wholly lost his sense of proportion in his isolation.

He had spent his whole life among people and

events; had gone in for every kind of outdoor and indoor exercise. And while he thought a great deal and thought well, it was only when he was talking or listening, or when he had some definite problem to solve—a speculation or a contest or a woman. Like all whose idle lives are full of people, he had no resources within himself.

Not until the third of June was he in condition to receive in his sitting room. This meant that he could expand his circle to include others than the doctors, the nurses, his valet, Miss Chase, Mr. Bristow, and an occasional man friend resolutely sacrificing himself to an hour's "duty" in a sick room. The first to enter the widened circle was impatient Georgina, full of dreams and imaginings and hopes and of those touching, beautiful idealizings which experience dispels forever as it relentlessly drives mortals from the Eden of youth. Georgina came under escort of her aunt—came with a speech of gratitude to him for saving her life, carefully studied out and learned. At sight of him it fled, and as she was

frantically beckoning it back, her eyes chanced to note that in a vase on the table at his elbow there was a bunch of white roses.

Each day, flowers had been sent to his room by the head gardener, and each day Georgina had herself covertly put among the flowers a bunch of white roses—and here it was, singled out for the highest honors! Singled out, not only from among the flowers of the Bristow gardens and hothouses, but from among all his flowers. In the beginning of his illness they had come to him from the city, and from the big houses in that part of the country. But his friends had rapidly relaxed their assiduity, until, by the end of the third week, aside from an occasional bunch of flowers—the offering of some casual impulse or accidentally jogged memory—there came only one regular token from the outside. It was always from the same New York florist; it was always two dozen magnificent full-blown red roses.

Georgina knew this. And when she saw where the white roses were, she looked around for the

red roses—for her one serious rival. There might be a place of even higher honor than the table at his elbow.

But he was speaking to her: "At last I've the chance to abase myself, mademoiselle." His tone was that of a grown person addressing a child; was deliberately so because he was reminding himself of her youth—was rebuking himself for the fancies he had permitted to overrun his fallow brain. "Will you forgive me for giving you that fearful shaking up?"

"Oh, that's nothing," she said. Why did she always appear so stupid before him? The thought made her stammer, as she went on: "I —I—it is I who must——" Suddenly she saw him in vivid fancy clinging to that tree; heard him saying, "Safe?" and assuring himself of it; and then, and not until then, giving way to the faintness he had fought down so long as she was in danger. And her shyness fled. A great splendid flame of natural, generous enthusiasm flashed up within her, and showed itself in beauty in her eyes and in her color.

"Oh—you were *so* brave!" she exclaimed.

And Robert Fenton flushed and thrilled like a boy, and knew that no woman had ever in all his life given him the pleasure that this girl, without in the least intending flattery or even compliment, had given him. "I wish I deserved that," was all he could say. Her unconsciousness of self passed as swiftly as it had come, and she looked frightened—painfully shy. He turned to Miss Chase, and began thanking her for some novels she had sent up that morning. And now Georgina had found the red roses in a tall jar in a corner of the room, *behind* him. And straightway there was as wild a tumult in her heart as the sight of him, so handsome, so "difficult," so compelling, had caused ten minutes before.

Presently her aunt was called away, and left, saying to Georgie, "I'll be gone only a moment." Fenton settled himself a little more comfortably and waited. He talked little to women or to men, until he knew them. It was an easy way to learn whether they were worth while, and if

they were, how to go forward. Poor Georgina was not ready for her opportunity.

"I must talk. I *must!*" she said to herself, pleadingly, reproachfully. But of what—of *what?* She glanced fearfully at him. She saw a twinkle in his eyes. She smiled—he smiled. She laughed.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Before I came up here," she explained, "I thought out and learned a little speech of gratitude to say to you. But it ran away and left me as soon as we opened your door. And now I've been trying to find something to say, and I can't think of anything because that miserable speech is all over the place."

"Well, you might recite it, and so get rid of it."

"No, thank you. I'll just sit silent."

"Am I such a dreadful person that you can't talk to me naturally? What have my nurses been saying about me?"

"The first time I heard of you, it was that you had been everywhere and seen everything. So,

all I could do would be to ask questions,"—she smiled. He liked her smile. It made him think of a garden of flowers seen suddenly, sparkling with dew, when the shutters are thrown open on a bright summer morning.

"It isn't fair to judge anyone by what others say of him," he replied.

"Why not?"

"Because everyone is a different person to each person he knows. With each person one meets, one has an opportunity to begin all over again and write a new reputation on a brand-new slate. You and I, for example—we start with a clean slate, each for the other."

She shook her head: "I think I understand you. But I don't think it's so. Each of us has only one slate——"

He made an impatient gesture with his eyebrows. "I see you've not yet thrown away your copybook."

She flushed. "Because a thing's in the copybook, that doesn't make it less true, does it?"

He looked amused; not at her simplicity, as

she thought, but at his own irritation. What a far cry it was from the Robert Fenton of before that accident to the Robert Fenton who, shut into this narrow world, was mooning over questions of morals, and was standing abashed and admiring before the snowy altars of innocence. "Pardon me for seeming to be irritated," he said to her, "but my nerves are not at their best. I've had too long a stay in one room with a person whose solitary company I've avoided as much as I could all my life. He and I have been wrangling over and staring at and cowering before the truth for five weeks and on. I'm just a little sick of—the truth." A long pause, then: "You're only just out of school?"

"Oh, no, it's almost a year now."

"A year! Think of that!" He stopped raillery and went on reflectively: "Still, one out of eighteen seems a vast deal more than one out of" —he hesitated and smiled humorously at himself —"out of forty. And are you glad or sorry to be out of school?"

"I'm—not—sure. I do so long to—to live!

And yet it frightens me. Sometimes I envy the sisters; not those who teach, but those who're walled away from the world, and hear it only as one hears the hum of the city. I envy them having their whole lives marked out for them, so that they can be sure each day that they've done all they ought to do."

Fenton was leaning his head back deep in the pillows, and thinking with his eyes almost closed. This child with her anxieties about "doing" and about "ought" did not strike him as at all amusing and primitive. "Yes, I can understand that," he said, absently. "But you wouldn't like it—really?"

"I—I think not. But I've felt for a long time that, if any great calamity were to come to me—if I found the world impossible to me—I'd go back to them. You don't know how tranquil it is, how soothing."

"Like being in one's grave and peacefully at rest, yet conscious of the comfort of it." He drew a deep breath, as if the idea somehow attracted him. "But," he went on, "you say you

long to live—to live bravely, I suppose. Wouldn't you think it cowardly to run away from the battle just because it happened to be going against you for the moment?"

"Yes—*that*. But I meant if I were—were like a mortally wounded soldier."

"Then"—he said, half to himself—"yes, of course." He moved impatiently. "How serious we are. We've no right to call ourselves soldiers; at least, I've no right. We sit in the boxes and watch the struggle as a sort of spectacle. And at the right places we hiss or applaud or shed comfortable theater tears. And when the show is over for the day, we gather our wraps about us and drive home in our comfortable carriages to our comfortable beds." And he ended with a satirical smile.

But Georgina didn't see it. She saw in him what she wished to see and only that. Her eyes flashed, and the resolute curve of her chin became conspicuous. "I'm sure you're not that kind," she said, with energy. "That would be real cowardice—worse. A coward has at least

tried to fight. And maybe he couldn't help being a coward. But to sit, selfish and indifferent, and watch one's fellow being struggle and die—to let others die for one—you'd *never* do that!"

He stirred uneasily. He had heard something like this before, but never from anyone but himself—himself holding him up in his innermost privacy for derision and scorn. "Then what do you purpose to do?" he asked.

"I don't know." She colored for no apparent reason. "It's very hard for a woman to do anything alone. I've thought I'd like to be one of those women you read about—the ones that become artists and players and doctors and—all sorts of things. But——"

"Well—why not?"

"I'm afraid I'm not that kind of woman. I—I couldn't be a leader. I might help some one else. I might take orders from some one or make suggestions—or——" She halted and became self-conscious again.

"You mean you could be a wife to some man who was trying to do something?"

"No, I didn't mean that"—she was pale with embarrassment. "I wasn't thinking of that just then. I wasn't thinking of anything definite."

"But why shouldn't you look forward to finding the young man who'll suit you and marrying him?" he insisted earnestly. Then he remembered to whom, to whose daughter, he was talking this heresy, this absurdity. "But you'll have small chance of finding the sort you seem to think you want at present. I'm afraid you're cut out to marry from the boxes, not from the arena. And—I think you'll realize before you're much older that your fate is, on the whole, much more comfortable. You're not old enough to appreciate comfort yet. It's among the few valuables that grow on one, with possession."

"But," she laughed, "I may not find the boxes comfortable."

"Oh, yes, you will."

"Do *you?*"

"Rather! I wouldn't move for the world. No dust and sweat for me, thank you. I never watch

the battle that I'm not thankful the good God created me to be a spectator."

She looked incredulous. "I'm sure you wrong yourself," she said, dropping back to earnestness. "And even if you haven't fought yet, you've been getting ready. And you'll fight the better when you do begin."

"Getting ready." He repeated the words thoughtfully. "Yes, I used to think that. But I either waited too long or never really intended to go down. Now my sword is rusted to the scabbard, and"—he sighed. He looked up, and found her eyes sympathetically upon him.

Aunt Martha came back, full of an amusing wrangle with the butler over some question of below-stairs precedence. And presently the two women went away. He could not shake off the mood into which the girl had compelled him. "No, not she," he protested, "but my infernal, lonesome, tiresome self, cooped up here for six weeks and forced to gnaw upon itself."

The next afternoon he had himself moved down to the veranda that looked upon the gar-

den. And Georgina sat with him, reading to him and talking with him. This for four afternoons. On the fifth it was raining and he remained in his sitting room, and she came to him there. She looked around for the red roses—an instinct, rather than a formulated curiosity, definitely directed. She could not have said why, but it made her so gay that she felt able to fight off the depression of the clouds and rain for them both, when, after a long search, she saw the red roses reposing in a half-opened box on the stand near the door.

"He does care for me!" she thought, and was caught up in a whirl of delight. And then she was bitterly ashamed. What of the other woman —the girl who was sending these flowers? "How she would suffer if she knew!" she said to herself. And she tried to be distant with him, and left him when she might have spent a whole long hour and a half more with him.

She hovered for a long while around Aunt Martha, and finally asked her, in a tone which she congratulated herself was the very pattern

of careless indifference, "I suppose Mr. Fenton is engaged."

"Engaged!" Miss Chase laughed. "He is notorious as a bachelor. He never has gone near young girls in the twenty years I've known him."

Georgina did not trust herself to answer, or to stay in the room where Aunt Martha might catch a glimpse of her tell-tale face.

V

THERE were two rainy days more; then on the fourth morning it was brilliant. Just as the groom led Georgina's horse by, Fenton was wheeled into his bay window with its jalousies drawn to shut out the direct sun. He didn't like the look of the horse. "Three days in the stable have put the devil into him," was his inference. And presently he heard the groom calling: "I'll hold him, miss, while you get down. There's no managing him to-day."

Georgina came into view. Nomad's ears were flat against his head; his always uneasy eyes and nostrils were wicked. His skin was quivering, and in the very way he lifted his feet from the ground and set them down he showed his vicious mood. Now he was darting from side to side; now wheeling and whirling; now he was jumping in the air; was rearing and backing—snorting

furiously the while, and shaking his body violently.

The groom watched for a chance, jumped in upon him, and caught him by the bit. "Can't you get down here, miss?" he asked.

"Let go, please," said Georgina sharply. "I must conquer him now or I can never ride him again."

The groom sprang back, and Nomad resumed his wild leaps and whirls and rushes. Fenton, in his excitement heedless of strain and pain, was leaning forward, occasionally half rising from his chair. And the nurse, peering through the slats of the blinds, was too absorbed to note what her patient was doing. Nomad seemed so powerful and cruel; the girl on his back seemed so small and slight.

"Beautiful! Beautiful!" exclaimed Fenton. Nomad had sprung into the air, rearing sharply as he rose, and flinging himself sideways. Georgina, with swift grace, had adjusted herself to each of these frantic spasms, and, by drawing the rein just right at just the right instant, had

saved him from falling as he descended. Again and again he tried to throw her, but he might as well have tried to fling off his mane. Lightly she sat, lightly she held him; stroking his neck gently whenever he paused to contrive some new violence; talking to him soothingly yet always with the note of command in her voice.

At the end of half an hour, when Fenton was wondering how much longer it would be possible for her to endure, Nomad suddenly gave up the fight and trotted briskly away. An hour and a half later Fenton, nervous for her although he knew a groom had followed her, heard the quick beats of hoofs. And soon Nomad came dashing round the curve, covered with froth and foam. There were long streamers of foam upon Georgina's riding skirt.

"She's been giving him a stiff run," Fenton said to himself. "And she looks fresher than when she started. What a girl—by jove, what a *woman!*"

Then he jeered at himself, and sank back among his pillows with a groan that was as much

mental as physical. For the first time in his life, he envied youth. He felt old and dreary and forlorn. "I'm a 'dead one,' " he muttered.

That day, after lunch, he was ensconced in a long chair on the veranda. Georgina, seated facing him, was reading one of Poe's tales aloud. Near by was Aunt Martha, dozing and playing with two bright-eyed, foolish-faced, mutually jealous Japanese spaniels. A servant brought her two cards. She read the names aloud: "Mrs. Alfred Westervelt, Mrs. Boyd Sylvester."

Fenton carelessly took a white rose from the buttonhole of his smoking jacket, and began to twirl it idly between his fingers and to smell it. "I suppose they've come to see me," he said. "Mrs. Westervelt's a sort of cousin of mine." The rose dropped from his careless fingers and fell among the cushions, out of sight. He fumbled vaguely for it, then gave up the search. Georgina, watching him covertly, wished he hadn't.

"Show the ladies out here," said Aunt Martha to the servant.

"Just a moment, Burke," interrupted Fenton, lazily. "I'm not sure I want to see them. What do *you* think?" That to Georgina.

"It'll be a distraction for you," she replied, hoping he would not heed her suggestion. She didn't want anyone to come; she had been impatient for Aunt Martha to go.

"That's just it—a distraction," said Fenton, absently, as if the idea were not alluring.

"The Westervelts live quite a distance from here," suggested Aunt Martha—most tactlessly, Georgina thought.

"Oh—well—yes, let's see them. They won't stay long, and—we'll—have it over with."

As he said this Georgina closed the book, rose, and started toward the open drawing-room window. Fenton looked longingly after her. As she was about to disappear, he called: "Please don't go, Miss Georgie. She'll leave as soon as she decently can; she's only come to make a duty visit. As soon as they're gone I want to go on with our story, don't you? I hate to drop it at the most interesting part." He put, perhaps un-

consciously, the faintest possible accent upon the word "story," and again upon the phrase about the interesting part. Just enough accent to suggest hazily a double meaning. Georgina turned, her brightening face showing what her feelings had been—to what a height she had been raised from her sudden depression. As she came toward his chair she saw that he was again searching for the white rose. And he found it and put it back in his buttonhole.

Now Burke was holding open the door leading into the main hall. Out upon the veranda came an indistinct elderly person, whom the eyes instantly abandoned for the personality following her. From this persuasive personality came a persuasive odor that seemed characteristic of it —a subtle, fine, faint odor of violets that straightway scented the whole veranda. She was tall and had one of those figures that delicately, yet distinctly and captivatingly, insinuate the idea of sex. To look at her was to think of Paris—Paris at the height of the season. For, beyond question, only in the Rue de

la Paix, or near it, could that toilet have been created, and only there could any woman have learned to wear it as Mrs. Sylvester was wearing it.

"How-do, Martha," said Mrs. Westervelt—though the day was warm and she was fat, she seemed to be cool. "And that's Georgiana—no, Georgina. Oh, there you are, Robert. How do you manage it so that you are *always* comfortable? Georgina, Martha, this is Mrs. Sylvester. She's stopping with us."

Mrs. Sylvester shook hands with Miss Chase and with Georgina, then greeted Fenton: "Poor Robert Fenton! What a fright you gave everybody! And we've all been *so* worried about you! And here you lie, comfortable and positively reeking with health." Her tone was light, but her eyes wandered from one bandage to another and rested at last upon his face; and her gaze met his with a look of frank and tender sympathy that made him flush faintly. Georgina was watching, was jealous.

This was the first time she had seen him with

another woman. And such a woman! Georgina felt awkward and, worse, insignificant.

But Mrs. Sylvester had turned away from Fenton, and was looking at her. It was a look Georgie couldn't help liking. And she soon had Georgie at her ease; was bringing out the best there was in her; was fascinating her with the charm of perfect manners—the manners that are not a reflection of the person one is addressing, but a part of one's own personality. When Burke brought her a glass of water she thanked him precisely as she would have thanked Fenton for the same service. "I like her, I like her," Georgina was saying to herself before half an hour had passed. "She's perfectly simple and frank. She deserves to be beautiful. Her outside expresses her inside." Georgina had a theory that outside beauty was a shining through from the interior. And she was in the very beginning of that long, long period in which we hunt for confirmation of one therein, and believe in them in defiance of any facts however fatal.

Simple and frank, indeed! Mrs. Sylvester had graduated from the world's highest schools of art and manners, including that last and greatest school where is taught the profound art of concealing art. Her black hair waved simply about her frank open brow, and was gathered in a simple knot at the back of her head just where a single red rose, seemingly an impulsive afterthought of a refined mind, peeped from under the brim of a big white hat with a single sweeping white plume. The fullnesses of her soft gray-white blouse, and the folds of her gray-white skirt fell in those simple natural lines that simple nature, somehow, never achieves. And she sat, and looked, and spoke, and smiled—all in a way so free from pose and pretence! Yet it made simple nature suggest red hands and clumsy feet.

"I wish I were like her," thought Georgie, with generous regret. "I must learn."

Aunt Martha was saying to Mrs. Sylvester: "Is it your first visit to this neighborhood?" It struck Georgina that Aunt Martha's tone was not

quite friendly, and she hoped Mrs. Sylvester wouldn't notice it.

"Yes," Mrs. Westervelt cut in, answering for her. "I've tried to get Virgie up here for six years. But she never would come. No doubt we were too dull for her. And day before yesterday I ran across her in the Waldorf at lunch, and she said she was in despair because she hadn't any place to go. So at last I got her."

"Yes," said Mrs. Sylvester, looking her frankest into Aunt Martha's polite but suspicious face. "I came up this morning. I hadn't been in the house three hours before I was on my way here."

"I simply couldn't stand the drive alone," said Mrs. Westervelt, rising.

As Mrs. Sylvester shook hands with Georgie, she said: "Don't forget, we're to meet halfway, at nine to-morrow morning."

"We can't miss each other, as there's only one road," replied Georgie.

Mrs. Westervelt patted Fenton on the shoulder. "Come to us, Robert, as soon as you can lift yourself off these unlucky people's hands.

You must be a frightful nuisance. We're relations, and won't mind so much."

"Good-bye," Mrs. Sylvester said to him with a nod and a bright smile, and she turned to Georgina. "You're taking good care of him. No wonder he is getting on so well." She did not even glance at Fenton again.

Georgina and Aunt Martha went to the front door with them. Georgie came back to Fenton alone. "Isn't Mrs. Sylvester beautiful?" she said. "And so sweet! That's the kind of woman I'd like to be when"—she smiled mockingly at him—"when I grow up."

"You've not met Mrs. Sylvester before?" asked Fenton.

"No, and I do hope she'll be friends with me."

"I think she will," said Fenton, reflectively. And when Georgie wasn't looking he smiled with some amusement at his own thoughts.

Later in the day Miss Chase found her niece alone, and said: "I shouldn't have too much to do with Mrs. Sylvester if I were you, my dear."

Georgina looked astonished. "Why not?" she inquired.

Miss Chase had no intention of enlightening Georgina's innocence. "Oh, there are—lots of stories about her."

"No doubt a great many women are jealous of her," replied Georgina.

"No doubt, and it's said that some of them have a cause that's—that's not creditable to her."

"I don't believe it," said Georgina.

"Perhaps you're right," Miss Chase admitted. "Women are so merciless and spiteful to each other." The fact was that Miss Chase herself had been half won by Mrs. Sylvester's calm-compelling manner, and could not convincingly revive the suspicion that she had felt as soon as she saw the name on the card. "If they cared anything at all about each other," she said to herself, "they'd not have been able to conceal it from *my* eyes. People do lie so!"

Each day Georgina had made a point of finding out whether the red roses had come. When she looked as usual, the morning after the call,

they were not there. Nor did they come the next morning, or any morning thereafter. A few days of this vain search for that which she longed not to find, and she was in an ecstasy of hope. "He must have written something to stop them," she told her believing self. "What other reason could there be, since he hasn't seen her? And if he did write, *why* did he write?" In the answer to that question, Georgie found the great cloudless happiness that only the young and inexperienced can entertain without fear and dread.

VI

IT was less than nine easy miles to the Westervelts', so Georgina and her new friend met almost every morning to take their ride together. Georgina talked a great deal of Fenton, Mrs. Sylvester merely listening. But there are two kinds of silence—the simple silence that discourages, and the subtle silence that encourages. It was not long before Mrs. Sylvester was in possession of the whole of Georgina's secret—this when Georgina fancied it still securely hid where none but Fenton could find it. Perhaps it was Mrs. Sylvester's thoughts on this purloined (not to use too coarse a word where so refined a woman is concerned) secret that caused the following conversations.

"Why do you look at me so peculiarly?" asked Georgina, when they were having their fifth ride.

"Envy," replied Mrs. Sylvester, in the tone so often used to make truth seem a liar.

Georgina laughed. "I wish it were," she said. "How that would flatter me!"

"You are so beautifully young," Mrs. Sylvester went on, "so *beautifully* young!"

"I look older than you do," said Georgina, and there was truth in it.

"You can afford to," replied Mrs. Sylvester, with a tinge of bitterness. And she changed the subject.

Naturally Georgina talked a great deal of her wonderful friend to "the prisoner," as she mockingly called Fenton whenever he looked morose. And what she said was not only generous, but also appreciative; and so it revived and quickened memories that had been sluggish or dormant.

He couldn't help feeling sorry for the girl that in her inexperience she was playing "the game" so badly. "She's too simple-minded even to know that one woman mustn't talk to a man of another woman; that, whether she says good or evil of her, she harms herself." He was at first tempted to warn Georgina off that fatal sub-

ject. But the more she talked the more he wanted to hear.

In the ten days following the call, Mrs. Sylvester lunched three times at the Bristows'. Twice she went away immediately after lunch, sending her regrets to "the prisoner" by Georgina—Fenton was never brought downstairs until after lunch. The third time he was on his way in his invalid chair to the veranda, when Mrs. Sylvester and Georgina came out of the dining room.

"You'll not be able to pretend much longer," said Mrs. Sylvester to him, with a pure friendliness of manner that somehow irritated him, though none knew better than he what a consummate actress she was. "Your arms are free and you're able to move about in your chair."

"The game's up," he said cheerfully. "I thought I'd be able to fool them for a week or two longer. I see I shall have to move on pretty quickly, if I don't wish to be invited to leave."

"You going to the Westervelts'?"

"I'm undecided," he answered. "I ought to go to town. But—I like it up here."

"You really mustn't disappoint Mrs. Westervelt"—and again Fenton was irritated by the apparent sincerity of her tone. "She's counting on you. You're to have my rooms. I'm off to Lenox on Monday. Boyd writes that everything's ready. My little girl will be there from school."

Georgina looked at her in surprise. "I didn't know you had a little girl," she said.

"I'm afraid I haven't. She's—let me see—fourteen. And as tall as I."

Georgina was amazed and showed it.

The servant came with the big tray. Mrs. Sylvester took coffee and a cigarette. "I'll have this, and fly," she said. "Really I shouldn't have come at all. What's the matter, Georgina?"

"I can't get used to the—the little girl." It seemed incredible to her that this frank, simple, young woman, whom she had been treating as a person of her own age, and had been regarding somehow as quite as inexperienced as herself, had an almost grown daughter. "I wish you hadn't told me. I feel—afraid of you. How foolish I must have been seeming to you all along."

Mrs. Sylvester sighed. "Not foolish, but wise —terribly wise. You've got the wisdom of the world-that-ought-to-be, while Robert and I have only the vulgar folly of the world-that-is-but-ought-not-to-be. She's by far the wiser, isn't she, Robert?"

"She certainly belongs in a different world," he replied.

"It's one from which poor I am barred forever," she said—and he thought he felt the sting of sarcasm, though her look and tone were pensive. "But you, my dear Robert"—she turned to Aunt Martha, who had just come out of the house—"it isn't fair, is it, Miss Chase?"

"What?" asked Aunt Martha.

"When I first knew this man here, I was eight years old, and he used to come to see my oldest sister——"

"Half-sister," corrected Fenton good-naturedly.

"And when I'd come into the room on my way down to my early dinner, he'd make me feel comfortable and important by talking to me as if I

were a grown person. And he seemed to be an old man then."

"I must have been at least twenty," said Fenton, and then he could hardly conceal his irritation at having thus shown that she was making him wince.

"Now," she went on, "I'm an oldish woman; while he—well, he may soon be suspecting me of plotting to marry him to my daughter."

"Nonsense," said Fenton curtly.

"Yes, Robert," said Mrs. Sylvester, laughing, "you could become an innocent boy again; could marry a girl any time in the next four or five years; and could give her four or five or six years of invaluable experience. And then you could pass away, leaving her a young widow." She rose and turned to Georgina. "Good-bye, little girl. Is everything over between us, now that you've found me out?"

Georgina tried to protest. But the last ten minutes had put her into a whirl of doubts and uncertainties about this new friend. "Oh, no," she said. "Oh, no—not that."

Mrs. Sylvester shook hands with Miss Chase, who was icy, and with Fenton, who was surly. She kissed Georgina, who almost shrank from her. At the door she paused and looked back with her frankest, most youthful smile. "Good-bye—good-bye again, Saint Robert. Don't forget to-morrow morning, Georgie." And she was gone.

The silence she left became oppressive. Miss Chase broke it by going in to discover the cause of a crash from the direction of the dining room.

"I wonder why I've begun to distrust Mrs. Sylvester," said Georgina, thoughtfully.

Fenton did not answer.

"Do you know I half suspect she's not like me, after all," Georgina went on. "She makes me think of—there's an old Italian cabinet up in mother's sitting room. And it has about a dozen drawers that anyone can see. It looks so graceful and simple, and you'd say there wasn't a place about it where you could hide anything. There aren't even keyholes or locks of any kind."

Fenton was smiling satirically into vacancy.

"But," continued Georgina, "it has more than twenty secret drawers and little hiding places. And every once in a while mother finds a new one. Mrs. Sylvester——"

"Is like that cabinet, you think?" Fenton said, as she paused.

"To-day it seems to me so. Yet—I can't help liking her."

Fenton looked at her curiously.

"I like that old Italian cabinet better than the most beautiful ordinary desk I ever saw."

Fenton slowly looked away as her eyes were about to meet his.

"It fascinates me," she went on, "and so does she."

"Still you'd rather be as you are?" he asked absently.

"I couldn't be any other way," she replied simply.

"No secret places, no quicksands, no pitfalls, no surprises, no tricks, no sharp turns, no arts."

She laughed uneasily. "That sounds dull," she said. "But I suppose I'm like that."

"Mrs. Sylvester envies you," said Fenton.

Georgina flushed with pleasure.

"Yes—envies you. I'm sure of it. She envies you because——" he hesitated.

"Why?" she asked eagerly.

His face clouded. "Because your time purse is overflowing with the wonderful coins of youth, each of them an incredible fortune in itself. Your purse is full, while hers——" He laughed cynically.

"It's full, too," she said.

"It looks full the way she holds it." He was silent for a moment, then, with an impatient gesture: "But let's not talk of youth, or think of it. I want to forget. I want you to help me forget."

Georgina colored and hid her eyes under their lids and long lashes. She wouldn't for worlds have let him see the joy, which the sudden leap of her heart had shot up into them. But he saw that she misunderstood him, and went on carelessly, in the tone of a grown person to a child: "I've got less than a week, you know. And then you'll be free to go back to your boys."

On Saturday morning Mrs. Sylvester rode at a canter into the Bristow grounds, and reined her horse in front of a bench where Fenton was seated alone, reading the newspapers. "Good morning," she said. "Where's Georgina?"

"She went away half an hour ago to meet you," he replied, rising with an effort.

"Please don't," she said, and dismounted. "I'm in luck. I wanted to talk to you alone. So I took crossroads to escape Georgina—poor child!"

She stood with her arm along her horse's neck. He bit his lips, impatient at himself for having to struggle to conceal his wild longing to take her in his arms, to kiss again and again that fair, subtle face, those eyes that could reveal such depths of emotion, yet always veiled the heart of her mystery. "I want to talk to you about her," she went on.

"About Georgina?" he asked, his tone suggesting the very mildest curiosity. "Won't you sit? I'm sure the bridle is long enough."

"Yes, about Georgina," she said, seating her-

self and holding to the extreme end of the reins. "Are you going to the Westervelts', day after to-morrow?"

"No—I'm going to town," he replied.

"And then to the Westervelts'?"

"Perhaps. Yes—I think so."

She gave a sigh of relief. "That makes it so much easier for me to be frank."

He smiled faintly. He knew what "frank" meant when Virginia used it.

"Georgina loves you," she continued. "And I—Robert, I want you to marry her."

He looked at her narrowly. She was looking at him, but he did not let her see how she had cut into him. "Really?" he said cheerfully. "Thank you."

"You say that lightly," she went on, with serious eyes upon him, "but I mean it. The first day I came here I saw that you and she were—were intended for each other. And I have seen a good deal of her to make sure. She is just the wife for you—ingenuous, innocent, so good and so devoted. And her youth will be so stimulating to

you. As we grow older we need youth about. It keeps us young, in heart at least."

"Certainly an attractive picture," he said amusedly. He was compelled to admire the ingenuity with which she searched out and found every joint in his armor. He knew her too well not to feel sure it was all a ruse. Yet there was just room for doubt. He could not look calmly at this problem where so much was at stake for him. So much? Everything! The only woman who had ever made him feel that the more she gave the more she withheld; the only woman who had never wearied him. His keenest interest in life; his one remaining keen interest in life. If she was merely pretending to urge Georgina on him, as he believed, and if she should try to brush aside the pretence and establish again the old relations which Georgie had interrupted, he might lose her altogether, this woman whom he had held for ten years only by the same means by which she had held him—by creating for her an atmosphere of uncertainty, so that she never felt sure how much he loved her or how long he

would love her. No, he must watch and wait. He must see just what this crisis was before he tried to meet it.

"Yes, she will make you an ideal wife. And"—she smiled as if she were trying to take the gall from a cruel truth—"you will soon need some one to look after you, my dear Robert. A man does as he gets older."

He winced exaggeratedly. "Ouch!" he exclaimed, with a good-humored laugh. "That hurts! But—you are right, my friend. Thank you for being so thoughtful for me." And he gave her a look of genuine gratitude, as if she had made easy what he had feared would be an embarrassing situation. "Another woman, even if she had ceased to care especially, would have had a sort of dog-in-the-manger jealousy. But you—you always were wonderful."

She paled a little before this praise, and could not look at him, though she was trying hard to turn her face toward his. "You forgot—very quickly," she couldn't help saying. Then she hastened to correct this: "But—no matter. I

am glad that you have found——" She did not finish.

"Found—what?" he asked.

"Georgina," she replied. And she rose and flung the bridle over her horse's neck. "No—no—don't rise. I can manage it beautifully." And she stood on the bench and gracefully sprang into the saddle. From this height she looked down at him. "When two people have been—what we've been to each other, it would be pitiful if they showed themselves mean and small when the—the end came. You couldn't be small enough to be sorry the woman you've cared for could let you go without a heartache." She looked dreamily into the distance, stroking her horse's mane. "If I could bring back the past—but I can't—we can't. And Mildred is growing up and fills a larger and larger place in my life. And I'll always have her. When a daughter marries her mother doesn't lose her." She gave him a wan smile.

He was standing, his physical pain forgotten. "Are you doing this to teach me a lesson?" he

said, between his clenched teeth. "Or, do you mean it, Virginia?"

As he advanced toward her, she backed the horse. "Good-bye," she said. "Good-bye, Saint Robert"—and she was off at a canter. His impulse was to order a carriage and follow her to the Westervelts'. But the counsels of experience prevailed. "If she meant it," he concluded, "to urge her would be folly. If she didn't mean it, to urge her would put me in her power; and I know what it means for a woman to be certain of a man of my age. If she isn't sure whether she meant it or not, to urge her would be to decide her against me. At any cost I must wait."

VII

FENTON was silent, and seemed morose at luncheon and afterward on the veranda with Bristow, Miss Chase, and Georgina. "I've had irritating news," he volunteered in apology. "I hope you"—he included them all by a glance, then addressed Miss Chase —"won't be as cheerful over part of it as I'm afraid you'll be. I must go to town to-morrow afternoon."

Georgina's fluttering hand had to set down the coffee cup and steady the other in her lap. Miss Chase's kind, thin, old face became funereal. Bristow was the only one of the three able to speak on the instant. "Rubbish, Fenton!" he protested. "You're not nearly well. What have we neglected that you're treating us this way?"

"You must give longer notice to quit, young man," said Aunt Martha, after a nervous glance toward, rather than at, her niece.

"Don't make it harder for me to go than it is now," he interrupted, almost pleadingly. The expression of Georgina's face had overwhelmed him with sudden shame and self-contempt. "It's a case of must. And I have to go to-morrow so that I'll be rested enough to attend to some business Monday morning."

The blood was throbbing and singing in Georgina's ears, and a mist was confusing her brain. "He's going away—going, going," she was repeating over and over to herself. "What shall I do? What shall I do? *He's* going—*he!*" She was relieved when luncheon was over and he went to his rooms. It gave her the chance to shut herself in. She tried to cry, but could not. She came down and wandered with the dogs among the shrubbery in front of the house. She was in full view of his windows, but he did not join her. She did not go up until there was just time to dress for dinner. She put on her best dress—best because he had complimented it, and her in it, with what was for him enthusiasm.

She was the first down, and roamed from room to room, always within sound of the stairway. But he was the last to descend in the evening. In evening dress he was always at his best, for then he displayed in its full attractiveness the superficial smartness that gave him his distinction.

All through dinner she kept her eyes on her plate. If she lifted them they could no more help seeking his face than a sunflower can help turning its face to the sun. Even her unobservant father saw that she was unhappy. But he, thinking of Fenton as almost one of his contemporaries, and of Georgina as still a baby, frankly spoke of it: "You see, Fenton, your nurse is taking your going to heart."

Georgina was woman enough to force a pale smile, and to cover with fair success the shock from this finger rudely pointing at her anguish. "Indeed I do," she murmured. "I—we——" But she could not trust herself to speak.

Fenton, for the first time in many a year, could think of nothing to say to relieve the tension. The dinner would have been a series of painful

interruptions to painful silences, had not the champagne made Bristow voluble, and the Wall Street situation given him a subject for volubility. Afterward he and Fenton went into the library to smoke, and the two women strolled out upon the veranda. No sooner had they settled themselves than Miss Chase was up and away. And, through her contriving, the butler presently went to Bristow and told him that the coachman wished to see him at once.

"Go out on the veranda, Fenton," said Bristow as he hastened away. "I'll be back presently." But on his way back, Aunt Martha, lying in wait, drew him into the drawing-room for dominoes. Meanwhile Fenton, off his guard, had gone upon the veranda. The instant he saw Georgina there alone he recognized the "trap."

But this "trap" did not stir his cynicism. He would have staked his life that Georgina knew nothing of it. Besides, he was too deep in self-loathing, when he saw her face, so young, so ethereally beautiful in that soft romantic light—so wistful. He knew that he was not without re-

sponsibility for whatever feeling she had for him. He had been lonely, had been attracted by her, had been enthralled—almost. And he had—well, he had not denied himself the pleasure of making himself liked, the luxury of feeling that he was liked. And, as he continued to look, he again saw himself as he once was or, perhaps, as he once vaguely strove to be. He did not regret the man who no longer either was or was possible; the man who would have appreciated as it deserved this beauty of body and soul, without those subtleties and arts that blunt the senses they make keen. No, he did not regret, any more than the epicure regrets the lost taste for simple food, or the degenerate the lost liking for delicate natural perfumes. But he felt debased—yes, debased, though unrepentant. And his honor prompted him to try to undo what he saw done there—"Though, of course, she'll get over it as soon as she goes among her own crowd again."

The moonbeams were sifting upon her through the foliage. She was in the pale blue that in

moonlight seems a mysterious, diaphanous white. Her eyes looked weirdly, wonderfully large, and full of dreams and promises of those delights that youth alone can give—or receive. He seated himself opposite her and went on with his cigarette, his face in the dimness beyond the moon's light. She spoke first: "You really aren't going to-morrow?"

"I must," he said, in the friendliest tone. "And I hope the boys won't make you forget me wholly."

"It's more likely that you'll forget me," she said, too agitated to reproach herself, as she often did, for being able to think of and say only stupid commonplaces, when she most wished to appear at her best before him.

"Oh, I'm not so old as all that," he protested, mockingly. "I've some memory left."

"Why do you always insist on your age? I—no one—ever thinks of it. A man is—just a man. And a woman likes him or she doesn't. Usually she doesn't if he's young and silly."

He laughed as if he had recalled something

amusing. "I was thinking," he said, "of the first time I saw you."

"At the ball?"

"Oh, dear, no. We'd been acquainted for years then. It was when you were three years old or thereabouts. You were taking the air with your mother, and she had the coachman draw up to the curb so that she could invite me to dinner."

She made a swift calculation and winced visibly. Bad as his story was, the truth was worse. She knew it was not she he had seen, but her brother, now in Europe on his wedding journey! Georgina caught her breath—it sounded very like a half-suppressed sob. "I don't care!" she exclaimed, her eyes searching longingly into the dimness for his face. "You're not old, and you'll never seem old to me."

"Thanks," he said, with raillery. "You're very consoling."

"I suppose you say those things about your age to let me know how foolish and childish I seem to you," she said, despondently.

"Childish—that is, very, very much of a child."

She leaned forward and looked earnestly toward him: "Am I so dreadfully tiresome to you?"

"What a funny child! Of course you aren't; I've been very happy here. Several times I've almost forgotten the—abyss between us."

"Don't say that—please." She was playing what seemed to her a game of life and death. And when one plays that game in youth, one does not pause to think how one's words sound.

He rose and half leaned, half sat upon the railing near her. "Yes—impassable," he repeated, in the most honest, most earnest tone he had used in many a year. "Five years from now I shall begin to be visibly old—at least oldish. But more than the outside, there's the inside. I'm older far than my years there, my dear. I'm old and tired and jaded. My ideals are gone; my enthusiasms are dead—and buried—and forgotten. You raised the poor pale ghosts of them for a few minutes with the magic of your youth.

But they vanished, and—I only feel the older for having seen them."

She was resting her elbow on the railing, her face against her hand. She shook her small head slowly, the lights and shadows shifting fascinatingly in her loosely bound hair. "Please don't talk—that way—about yourself—to me."

Her earnestness, her beauty, the soft whiteness of her bare arms and shoulders, that subtle curve of throat and chin, which vanishes even with the advance of youth itself, as the climax of the beauty of the dawn vanishes even when the day is not yet born—before these a sense of her youth, of his oldness swept over him. He felt like a man who has been robbed at life's banquet, and is flung out to stare hungrily in through the windows. This for the moment, and it made him say: "Please—please let's not talk of it. If you only knew how bitter and wretched it makes me, to look at you and think—that my youth is gone."

Her breath came fast and her eyes were brilliant. "Oh, why will you say those things? Can't you *see* that——"

"Yes, I can see," he interrupted. "And I'm not so base as—well, as I might be. No—no—this is all false. Good God! what am I saying? And I wanted to be honest with you."

She covered her face for an instant, then without saying good night or any other word, without looking toward him, she slipped from the moonlight into the dimness and stole noiselessly away.

"Why, where's Georgie?" inquired Bristow, coming to the window a few minutes later.

"She got tired of my prosing," said Fenton carelessly, "and went to bed."

Bristow laughed. "You're getting old, Fenton, not to be able to detain a girl on such a night as this, with not another man about."

VIII

IN the unimaginative daylight it struck Fenton at once that he had been thoroughly ridiculous. "Senile folly!" he muttered, as he was shaving. But the scourge did not touch his vanity, because the face he was shaving had not a trace of real age in it—even his throat under his chin looked less than forty, anyhow. Georgina did not come down until lunch time, but he was still so disgusted with himself for taking the matter seriously that he had some difficulty in not looking frankly sheepish before her. She was pale and there was darkness and heaviness in her eyelids and under her eyes. But she was composed and treated him with unaffected friendliness that had no restraint in it. "She looks as if she had grown up overnight," he thought, "and it's very becoming to her. She's going to make a very interesting woman some day."

Not until he was saying good-bye did he suspect that the quietness was only on the surface. Then her hand felt cold as it lay in his and her paleness became death-like. "Wonder if she's going to make a scene," he thought with some uneasiness. Suddenly, as if against her will, she lifted her eyes to his—gave him a look which filled him with a sort of terror. All the way to the station, at intervals on the way to New York, that look haunted him. "What did it mean?" he said. "I never saw anything like that before." But his nature had been trained through all those years to feel and to understand only the emotions that can survive and thrive in an atmosphere of selfishness. "She's a strange child!" he said, and that was all he could make of it.

He settled himself in his house in New York as comfortably as the heat and the loneliness permitted. It was not until Friday that his patience was rewarded. In Friday morning's mail came the letter from Lenox: "So, my dear, you didn't go to Mrs. W——'s after all. Perhaps I was too hasty in deciding that you needed a perma-

nent nurse. Why should you stay on in town when you might be here?"

There was a smutch of red on the paper, and after it this postscript: "That red came from my cheek—the first time I've ever had to do such a thing. Please come——"

Then a second postscript: "You ought to be ashamed of yourself about G. If you could have heard her talk of you! Really I think it'll take her at least three months to recover from you—entirely. It's lucky for us women that most of us learn our lesson while we're young, when broken hearts heal as easily as broken bones. How are your bones?"

Such a complete surrender astonished him. "But then few people have real courage," he reflected philosophically, now that he was easy in his mind. And he told his valet to pack and to get the tickets for Lenox.

But instead of going to Lenox the next morning, he took a train up the Hudson. And at three o'clock he was driving up the entrance to the Bristow house. He asked Burke to find out

whether Miss Georgina would see him, and was shown into the cool dusk of the drawing-room. He stood as she entered; the look—that haunting, terrifying look which had compelled him to come there—was not in her eyes now, and he felt as if the spell it had cast over him was broken. "What am I doing here?" he wondered, and he had a preposterous impulse to bolt. They shook hands, and she seated herself. He stood before her, undecided whether to say the words he had come to say. Now he was getting used to the faint light; now he could see her face quite distinctly, could see a look in it that made him think of a white rose suddenly blighted in the heydey of its summer splendor. "I came to say," he began—"Georgie, will you marry me?"

She looked steadily at him, and her eyes seemed to see into his very mind. "Do you love me?" she asked gravely.

His eyes shifted. "I offer you the best I have to give," he replied.

"Do you love me?" she repeated.

"There is a woman who can never be any more

to me than she now is," he said slowly. "Any more—nor any less."

"Then you do not love me."

"I do not love anyone," he answered. "I had a friend once who had the morphine habit. I've seen him sit for hours staring at the bottle before him. And I've never seen such an expression as he used to have. And he would talk ramblingly to it—reproaches, curses. He'd shake his fists and grind his teeth. And once, when I was trying to reason with him about his habit, I took hold of the bottle without thinking what I was doing. He screamed and snatched it, and gave me a look of hate——" Fenton laughed without mirth, but with a certain amount of self-consciousness.

"Then you do not love me," repeated Georgina—not an inquiry, but an assertion—made dispassionately.

"I can never again give anyone what *you* would call love."

"What have I ever said or done," she said evenly, "to make you think so poorly of me? No, of course, you don't understand—what I've

been feeling and thinking since Saturday. I'm not the same person." She put her hand on her bosom. "Something has died here."

Her eyes flashed at his expression and she stood up. "Don't pity me!" she exclaimed. "Don't you dare pity me! I don't suffer, and it wasn't *you* that killed it—it was I! It will never trouble me again." She smiled mournfully and put out her hand. "Good-bye," she said, and left the room.

He stood astounded. "What does she mean?" he said. And he repeated it, sometimes half aloud, every few minutes all the way back to New York. "A strange woman!" And that was the farthest he ever got into her mystery.

He took the train for Lenox the next morning—after reviewing the advantages and disadvantages of the various places he might go to, and deciding that, on the whole, Lenox offered the fewest disadvantages. So far as Mrs. Sylvester was concerned, he felt like a man who is invited to turn from the study of the mystery of a universe to unravel an acrostic on the back page of a country weekly.

IX

THE day Georgina took the veil her father sat alone all day in front of the open fire in his office downtown. His secretary, Ronald Bright, looked in now and then, but did not venture to intrude farther than the threshold. When the darkness of evening began to gather, Bright, thinking the older man might be asleep, touched him on the shoulder. As his chief's face turned slowly toward him, he saw tears in his eyes.

"What is it, sir," asked the secretary impulsively. "Can I help you in any way?"

"Thank you, Ronald," the old man slowly shook his head—Bright had never before thought of him as an old man. "Nothing—nothing." He rose painfully, and stood with shoulders drooped. "To-day I lost my daughter—my only daughter—forever!" He stretched his trembling hands toward the fire. "It is cold," he said.